

# The Journal of Liberal Religion

*Editor*

JAMES LUTHER ADAMS

*Associate Editors*

R. LESTER MONDALE  
HUGH STEVENSON TIGNER

*Business Manager*

EDWARD W. OHRENSTEIN

Vol. II

SPRING, 1941

No. 4

\$1 a year—25c a copy



287

*Manuscripts and correspondence should be directed to the Editor at 5701 Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, Ill. Subscriptions should be sent to the Rev. Edward W. Ohrenstein, Hinsdale, Ill.*

## Our Contributors

ARCHIE J. BAHM is Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Sociology at Texas Technological College, Lubbock, Texas.

CHARLES LYTTLE is Professor of Church History at The Meadville Theological School.

HUGH STEVENSON TIGER is the minister of the Universalist Church of Canton, N. Y. and an Associate Editor of THE JOURNAL OF LIBERAL RELIGION. He is also the author of *Our Prodigal Son Culture*.

GEORG J. M. WALÉN is the minister of the Nora Free Christian Church (Unitarian) of Hanska, Minnesota. He is also the Editor of *Mere Lys* (More Light!), a quarterly journal of liberal religion for Scandinavian Americans.

HENRY NELSON WIEMAN is Professor of Christian Theology at the Divinity School of The University of Chicago. His most recent book is *The Growth of Religion*, of which Walter Marshall Horton is co-author.

---

*We are happy to report that despite the war our sister magazine in Switzerland, Schweizerische Theologische Umschau, edited by Professor Martin Werner of Bern, continues to appear. The December (1940) issue of this quarterly contains two articles on the subject of theological education, one by the Editor and the other by our friend, Dr. Edward Platzhoff-Lejeune of Territet, Switzerland. This issue contains also a brief, cordial reference to THE JOURNAL OF LIBERAL RELIGION. We return the greeting to our friends in Switzerland.*



# Theology and the Philosophy of Religion: A Comparison and a Contrast

HENRY NELSON WIEMAN

Religion as a life-shaping interest of man needs the help which two kinds of thinking can give and needs it sorely. But their efforts to help are blocked in many cases because of popular as well as academic misunderstanding of what each is fitted to do. If one comes to theology or to philosophy of religion seeking what it cannot give and was never intended to provide, he will not get any help. Moreover, not finding what he sought, he may forever after feel that this particular branch of inquiry is worthless. Also workers in these respective fields misunderstand one another and thereby entangle and frustrate. Oftentimes each tries to turn people away from the help which the other proffers. Hence in this time of its need Christianity is bereft of the services which it should have. This is the situation which impels the present attempt to interpret and disentangle the work of these two important servants of the Christian faith.

We shall inquire first wherein the two are identical; then how they differ in respect to method and resources; and then we shall note the distinctive contribution that each can make to Christianity.

## *Wherein the Two are Identical*

Both are intellectual inquiries into the nature and evidence pertaining to the objects of Christian faith. We are here speaking of those theologians and philosophers who have inherited the Christian tradition. Such men have been shaped from infancy by this tradition even though they were born in "unchristian" homes and do now claim to repudiate what they call "Christianity." Willy nilly, whether they like it or not and whether they know it or not, their minds were moulded by a Christian culture before ever they were able to form any judgments at all upon the matter. We are here using Christian not in a eulogistic sense but to designate a massive fact of history.

There is a naive notion abroad that a philosopher is independent

of all traditions, or at any rate of the traditional religious heritage. Somehow, according to this view, he can think in terms of a universal reason unaffected by the particular traditions of his time and place. All informed people know, to the contrary, that every man's mind is created by interaction with the people round about him and the philosopher is no exception. Universal reason in the sense indicated is a myth. Therefore if a philosopher was born into the Christian tradition, and especially if he was reared in a pious Christian home, as most of them have been, he will think as a Christian and cannot do otherwise. So this alleged contrast between theologian and philosopher, namely, that the theologian thinks in and with and for a certain particular religious community while the philosopher does not, is false.

Some may say in behalf of the theologian that he does not conduct intellectual inquiry into the nature and evidence pertaining to the object of Christian faith because he begins and ends with revelation. Revelation is a self-disclosure of God given on God's own initiative and is self-authenticating to him who accepts it by faith. The human mind cannot attain it by inquiry and cannot test its truth say these objectors. When theology does take this position, so it is said, theology does not share with philosophy in the kind of intellectual inquiry we have ascribed to both. This we believe is an error.

It is true that much theology does take its stand on revelation, but even when this is the case the theological undertaking is still an intellectual inquiry into the nature and evidence for religious truth because there are many intellectual problems ancillary to the revelation. The revelation must be apprehended and that is in some part at least an intellectual matter. Also, when other alleged truths seem to contradict it, these contradictions must be looked into. So we claim that our first point of identity between theology and philosophy of religion holds good despite the fact that theology upholds revelation somewhat more commonly, perhaps, than does philosophy of religion.

However, philosophy of religion, in many cases, is a defender of revelation. For example, Thomas Aquinas claimed in substance that philosophy knows nothing as revealed, while theology knows nothing as not revealed. But it is obvious that Thomas' philosophy



was very largely designed to provide a place for revelation and in that sense was as much concerned with it as theology. Coming down to our own time, William Temple, in his *Nature, Man and God*, constructs his philosophy of religion with a mind to the place and need of revelation. Many other instances could be cited to support our claim that the acceptance of revelation is not the point of difference between these two disciplines. Some theologies do not accept revelation without subjecting it to so much critical examination and reinterpretation as to make it almost indistinguishable from truth found by intellectual inquiry. Some philosophies of religion, on the other hand, do accept revelation quite wholeheartedly.

A further point of identity shared in common by theology and philosophy of religion is a matter of first importance and has often been overlooked. It has frequently been alleged that while theology is an expression of religion and requires religious commitment (faith) to conduct it effectively, philosophy of religion is coldly intellectual and does not require religious devotion on the part of the investigator. This is a grievous source of misunderstanding and has, perhaps, done more than anything else to prevent these two from rendering the service they might to religious living.

The philosopher of religion quite as much as the theologian must be committed to the control of a mastering religious devotion in order to find and test the truth he seeks. This is so not because the quest of religious knowledge is peculiar in this respect, except in degree. One cannot get knowledge about anything that is recalcitrant and difficult and requires peculiar powers of discrimination, sensitivity and creative imagination, unless he is deeply committed not only to the enterprise of seeking such knowledge but is also devoted to the reality sought. All this applies even to science and to that most cold-blooded kind of knowledge called physics, many assertions to the contrary notwithstanding. It is commonly said that scientific knowledge is public, meaning that any competent man can know and test it. But the term "competent" gives the whole case away. No man can conduct scientific inquiry as it is done today in physics unless he is committed to that kind of search. It must be a commitment which arises from having

inherited a tradition of scientific knowledge and method wherein men interact on one another in such a way as to transform and redirect and refine the sensitivities, the ways of thinking and feeling, the power of discrimination in certain areas. The scientist in this field must have committed himself to a brotherhood and a body of knowledge, belief and method accumulated through a sequence of generations. Without the aid of this brotherhood and tradition and commitment to it, no individual can acquire the techniques, skills, mechanisms and formulae by which modern scientific researches are conducted.

Now all this applies to the kind of inquiry conducted by theology and philosophy of religion, but to an even greater degree, because the realities sought by these studies require even more appreciative response to discriminate and evaluate them. Hence to say that philosophy of religion does not require religious commitment, and therefore participation in a religious community and tradition which transform and refine the sensitivities and powers of discrimination and provide the techniques and skills and insights needed for such search, is to betray ignorance concerning how knowledge is gotten of all recondite matters and especially matters that are intrinsically characterized by great worthfulness.

So we say that theology and philosophy of religion are both expressions of the Christian community. Both are inquiries which one cannot conduct successfully unless he already has the Christian faith. Both seek to serve the church and help people conduct their religious lives more effectively and at deeper levels. The theologian may examine and criticize the presuppositions of the faith as much as the philosopher. Not all theologians and philosophers do this to the same degree, but the line of distinction between them cannot be drawn on this issue. The theologian may range as far and wide in his search for truth as the philosopher, and his devotion to truth may be as great. He is not necessarily any more provincial than the philosopher.

We have tried to show wherein theology and philosophy of religion are alike and in so doing have repudiated many alleged differences which have been held to distinguish them. However, they are sharply different and particularly in two respects: they differ in the tools they use to do their thinking, and they differ



in the resources upon which they draw to get their formulation of problems, the questions they try to answer, the insights and categories they use. By reason of these two differences the services they respectively render to religion are very different. Where one is strong the other is weak. What theology is chiefly good for, is not at all the same as what philosophy can best do. To these differences we now turn.

*They Differ in the Words They Use to Do Their Thinking*

Words are the tools by which all thinking is done. But the kind of words best suited to thinking in one area is not the best for another. The theologian uses as the tools for his thinking the words which are also employed in preaching, in religious ceremonial and in private devotion. The philosopher uses as the tools for his thinking whatever technical terms seem fitted to designate most accurately the differentia which characterize realities which he is seeking to discriminate and inter-relate, whether or not these terms can also be used in preaching and other religious practice. This difference in the tools they use when conducting their intellectual inquiries, while it may seem trivial to one not acquainted with recent studies in the nature of symbolism and language generally, is far-reaching and profound in determining what the two kinds of investigation are best able to accomplish.

The important point to note is that any words fit for use in the practice of religious living must have what the experts in language call a powerful load of the pragmatic dimension of meaning. They must have strong emotive appeal. They must have such psychological associations that when they are used under proper circumstances they will awaken the deeper levels of response. They must stir feelings and impel behavior. For example, if I yell, Fire! in a crowded house under proper circumstances, the effect upon the people present may be enormous. But if I simply assert, This house is undergoing rapid oxidation, scarcely anyone will stir in his seat. "Fire!" is heavily loaded with the pragmatic dimension of meaning. It has emotive appeal. "This house is undergoing rapid oxidation," is a way of stating the matter which does not stimulate the glands, although it is much more accurate in its designation and might be more effective as a tool for conducting intellectual inquiry. Right here we see the difference

between theology and philosophy of religion. Theology uses as tools for its thinking words which are analogous to "Fire!", while philosophy of religion uses terms comparable to a statement which would assert the same thing but in very different language as, for instance: This house is undergoing rapid oxidation. Both kinds of words may designate the same reality. But the words which philosophy of religion uses in its inquiries are often quite useless for direct application to religious ceremonial and private devotion, because they do not awaken religious response. On this account many have repudiated the services of philosophy of religion as worthless altogether for practical religion. But this is a grave error and based on a misunderstanding of what is involved in the conduct of religious life.

It is true that the work of philosophy of religion is worthless when there is no practical need in religious living to discriminate accurately those realities to which religious commitment is made. There are times when such accurate discrimination is not required even for the noblest and most effective Christian living. Such times are those when the grooves of tradition guide men to the most important objectives of religious devotion accessible then. All that men need in such times are words which quicken devotion and impel to action. The channels of tradition guide one to the best there is when once he is motivated. One must be awakened to make the religious commitment, but there is no need nor opportunity for him to find his way by intellectual inquiry nor by accurate semantical discrimination. Indeed, any attempt to do so would in such epochs do much more harm than good. In such an era the channels of tradition guide people much more effectively than could ever be done by distinguishing cognitively among the many realities open to experience. The deeper levels of response must be awakened by proper words and other symbols, but accurate designation in the semantical dimension of meaning is not required. In such times theology has its great work to do.

But here immediately two objections will be raised. The first is that theology notoriously is not inspirational. It does not stir men to make the ultimate religious commitment. Rather it is held to be arid, "dry as dust." Whether or not this is true need not concern us here for it misses the point. Our point is that words,



to be motivatively effective in religious ceremonial and preaching, must not confuse and bewilder the people who use them and hear them. The words must "make sense." But words do not continue to make sense unless they are regularly refurbished. That is to say, cultural change is always going on, however imperceptibly at times that may be. This means that the minds of men are changing, different feelings and ideas are emerging and the constellation of ideas is being transformed. These changes in the minds of men will make the old words become nonsense unless their syntactical meanings are kept clarified. Syntactical meaning can be simply defined as the way words must be put together to make sense. It is the business of the theologian to keep religious words organized and related to one another and to all other words in usage so that religious phraseology will make sense and thereby be fit for usage by the priests and prophets who directly inspire to religious living.

Of course a theologian may do much more than this. He may search the depths of being, even as the philosopher, in order the better to apprehend in the semantical dimension of meaning what may be the nature of God and other matters of religious concern. But even when he does do this he continues to use, as the tools of his inquiry, the words that have emotive appeal rather than other words which might be more technically accurate. If the reader questions this we ask him to look into the books written by theologians on the one hand, and philosophers of religion on the other, and see for himself if the theologian does not use a larger percentage of those terms common in preaching than does the philosopher. We do not mean that the philosopher never uses such words, nor that the theologian never uses other terms. It is not an absolute difference. In the realm of existential reality differences never are absolute. It is always a matter of degree. But the degree is sufficiently marked to be noticeable, I think, in any casual reading of the works of theologians and philosophers of religion respectively.

It would seem to be almost inevitable that the theologian should use such words more than the philosopher because theologians are almost invariably in theological schools and are engaged in training men to preach and otherwise inspire religious commitment in the

general populace. The philosopher of religion is not so universally given to this, and even when he is in a theological school, his work is not so directly connected with the direct religious ministry. He will have a larger proportion of men who intend to teach rather than preach, and those of his students who do preach will ordinarily think of his instruction as giving them materials that are not so directly applicable to religious inspiration, however valuable they may be for other purposes.

What, then, is the job of the philosopher of religion and when are his services needed? They are needed when the ancient tradition no longer can guide men satisfactorily to important religious reality without a great deal of careful intellectual discrimination in the semantical dimension of meaning which words may bear, and, perhaps also, a good amount of rediscovery of religious reality by direct inquiry into the nature of things. Such inadequacy in the guiding tradition arises when it is disrupted by many and frequent innovations, and corrupted by many dilutions from other traditions. Obviously we today live in such a time.

Since it is the job of the philosopher of religion to search out the nature of religious reality when tradition fails to guide, he must use the most accurately designative terms that he can get, regardless of their emotive appeal. This does not mean that he is any less dependent upon emotive words for the conduct of his own religious living, than is any other. Neither does it mean that he repudiates the words of religious living and theological thinking. On the contrary, his starting point must always be with these, for it is his business to ascertain with more precision what are the criteria by which one may distinguish the realities which these words in current religious usage are intended to designate.

Let us illustrate this difference between theologian and philosopher by a simple case. Suppose you ask a theologian: What is God? He might reply with such words as: Creator, Supreme Being, Ruler of Heaven and Earth, Father in Heaven, Savior and Redeemer. Obviously these words are very close to the language of religious ceremonial and are pragmatically effective under favorable circumstances. But they do not establish any criteria by which we can distinguish, among the happenings that are going on about us all the time, any sort of happening that can be clearly



identified with God more than any other. On the other hand, if you ask a philosopher of religion: What is God?, he might reply thus: God is the growth of more inclusive wholes (Overstreet). Or again: God is what connects actuality and ideal possibility (Dewey). Or: God is what increases the qualitative richness of life (Whitehead). These men go on to make clear what kind of happening plainly discoverable in the world round about us can be identified with God under these terms. How close they may be to the truth is not now under consideration. We are only trying to make plain the difference between the way the theologian goes about his work on the one hand, and the philosopher of religion on the other. We say it can be traced back to the kind of words they use respectively. The one makes more use of words with religious emotive appeal, and has the responsibility of keeping clear their syntactical dimension of meaning. The philosopher of religion makes more use of words chosen for their serviceability in designating rather than motivating, and has the responsibility of designating more clearly the kind of happening going on in the world that can be identified with God.

The Hebrew prophets were neither theologians nor philosophers of religion, but we do believe that they were much more concerned with designating the sort of happenings going on in the world about them and open to common observation which could be called the actual and present working of God, than they were with making more effective the religious words handed down in tradition. We suspect they were trying harder to make people see what God was doing in the social historical world of their time, than they were with awakening religious response. We surmise they felt that religious response would take care of itself, once you could get people to distinguish in the events then and there transpiring, those particular ones which were the peculiar expression of God. In any case it is this designative function of words which chiefly concerns the philosopher of religion, while it is the emotive and syntactical which the theological seminary must make paramount because of the nature of its primary task.

The difference between theology and philosophy of religion which we have been trying to make plain is the difference in the tools with which they do their thinking. There is a second dif-

ference which is a corollary of this one and would not be important enough to mention were it not also the source of a great deal of misunderstanding and mutual frustration between them. It has to do with the difference in the resources on which they respectively draw.

*The Resources on Which They Draw*

The theologian draws upon the theological thinkers of the past and present for his insights, categories, questions and the formulation of his problems. Of course the theologian may be well acquainted with works in philosophy, but that is not the issue. The point is that he takes over from historical developments in theology, more than from scientific philosophy, those problems, analyses, divisions and strivings which have been the major interest of other theologians. The philosopher, on the other hand, gets his questions and guidance for formulating and analyzing issues from the works of the philosophers. Here again there is no absolute difference. These absolute differences are always illusory. The philosopher may study the theologians, even as the theologian does the philosopher. But if the philosopher comes more fully under the influence of the theologians than of the philosophers he should properly be called a theologian. Obviously here as elsewhere individual cases may be so near the halfway point as to be doubtful in classification.

The difference that we have just noted is one of the major sources of misunderstanding between the two. A worker in philosophy of religion, for example, will often be held up to dispraise by theological thinkers because he does not undertake the kind of problems, or treat them in the same way, as do the theologians. Philosophers are guilty of the same inexcusable treatment of theologians.

One further fact about the present state of religious thought in relation to the intellectual climate of our time should make plain religion's peculiar need for the services of philosophy of religion.

The secular world has developed powerful instruments of truth-seeking which penetrate widely and deeply into all reality. We refer not only to the several sciences but also and perhaps chiefly to what is called scientific philosophy. The use of these instruments has been so effective in discriminating various kinds of



reality which were previously obscure and confused or wholly hidden, that the modern mind has become conditioned to their use. This has gone so far that men today, generally speaking, cannot recognize any kind of reality as reliably cognized unless it has been authenticated by these instruments of truth-getting. But these instruments are secular, meaning that they are technical, unhallowed by religious tradition, and therefore lacking in that kind of psychological association which would give them motivating power.

Now the needs of the preacher and the priest, and the need generally of having words that will arouse religious devotion, have dominated the field of religious thought. Consequently these technical, secular, unemotional instruments of truth-seeking have not been ordinarily used in the field of religion. That is to say, men with religious commitment have not ordinarily appropriated these instruments to seek out the realities which command religious devotion. They have not used them to establish criteria by which to distinguish more precisely in an age of confusion what these religious realities are in differentiation from other matters.

We have already seen that one cannot find religious reality without religious commitment any more than one can find those realities which concern the physicist or other scientist without commitment to the brotherhood and tradition of that science. Otherwise one cannot have the trained and disciplined sensitivities, the direction of focussed attention, the appreciative consciousness, the formulae and questions and problems and interests and relevant knowledge required to discern the realities in that particular field of inquiry.

Here, then, we see the situation. On the one hand we have these powerful instruments of truth-getting but without adaptation to the needs of religious inquiry and without men of profound religious commitment equipped to use them. On the other hand we see the minds of modern men increasingly so conditioned that they cannot recognize as valid any assertion that cannot be directly or indirectly authenticated by these instruments. No wonder traditional religion is losing its hold on great numbers of intelligent minds today!

Yet there is every reason to believe that if these most powerful

instruments of intellectual inquiry were adapted to religious search, and if men of profound religious commitment were equipped to use them, they could be made to uncover the lineaments of deity in the midst of the world in which they live. This is a job cut out for the philosopher of religion. It is his job rather than the theologian's for two reasons. It is his first because these instruments of inquiry are made up of terms which do not have the emotive appeal of traditional religious symbols. It is his, in the second place, because modern philosophy working in close conjunction with the sciences has developed these instruments and hence philosophy rather than theology is the resource on which the thinker would have to draw who made use of them in religious inquiry.

In looking at this job which philosophy of religion is called to do we must again take note of the problem of revelation, for in the minds of some this seems to block the path to any intellectual search into the reality of God, the way of salvation and the like. Suppose we grant the claim, as we are inclined to do, that God on his own initiative must make himself known to man else men can have no important knowledge of God. Suppose we grant, furthermore, that God is transcendent in such manner that no amount of searching of this empirical world would ever give us the knowledge of God which we must have to be savingly committed to him. Let us take all this for granted. Still we have to ask: How do we know that any alleged content of revelation is truly God's own self-disclosure to man and not some false claim to that effect? Obviously many false claims of this sort have been made. How do we know that the particular form of alleged revelation which we cherish is truly God's self-disclosure. You say that it is self-authenticating in your experience. Well, that is what Mary Baker Eddy would say about her revelation and the same claim is made by the Mormon leaders. But, you say, mine is Christian. So were Mrs. Eddy's and the Mormons' in the sense of belonging to the Christian tradition.

The point we are trying to make is that revelation, when granted along with God's most complete transcendence, leaves the problem of knowledge exactly where it was in the beginning. Divine revelation and transcendence do not alter in the least the imperative de-



mand that we use the most powerful instruments of intellectual inquiry to designate and distinguish with the utmost accuracy possible what sort of reality is true revelation as over against what is mistakenly held to be such. Rather we should say that any revelation of himself made by a transcendent God renders all the more imperative the demand that we sacrifice whatever emotive appeal may be needed in order to get terms which can designate and distinguish with utmost truthfulness. Add to all this the fact that unaided tradition today can no longer guide us aright.

All this is not to be understood to mean that emotive words are any less needed now for religious living than in other times. No, men today must be aroused to make religious commitment and to this end motivating symbols are as indispensable as ever. These symbols must be given adequate formal structure. They must be related to one another in such a way as to make sense. This the theologian is alone fitted to do.

Theology and philosophy of religion both have important work to do in the world today. Perhaps never before have they had so great responsibility for the renewing and directing, the deepening and purging, of religious devotion. They can meet this responsibility only by working in close conjunction and with fullest possible mutual understanding and appreciation. Hence the importance of demarcating their respective fields and pointing out the important contribution of each. On the other hand, we do not mean to suggest that any religious thinker should feel it necessary to keep to one side of the fence exclusively when these two areas of religious intellectual endeavor are distinguished. Rather we are inclined to think that the most effective work can be done by men who work in both fields at once. That makes it all the more important that the distinctive nature of the job of each should be clearly seen and the tools and resources be used in each field which are proper to it. In the confusion and the need of our time these two kinds of thinkers must renew the vision of that creative might which is God's reality.

## The Church Is Necessary

HUGH STEVENSON TIGNER

Channing Pollock's recent broadside<sup>1</sup> on "Why I Don't Go to Church" was a piece of criticism comparable to an unwritten treatise by John Barrymore on "Why I Don't Stay Married." But it represented, apparently, the way many people have come to feel, and did succeed in raising a question about which there is a whole lot of fuzzy thinking and honest doubt. That is the importance of the church to a man's religion—more specifically, the relationship of church membership and church attendance to Christian living.

Mr. Pollock—speaking for a host, I presume—said there is no necessary relation between these two things. At least there isn't so far as he is concerned. His is a free-lance, self-sufficient religion. He insists that he's as Christian as the next man, and that he can worship on his own and outside the church better than in it. Indeed, anyone conventional-minded enough to bother a member of the species *Pollockus* on a Sunday morning with an invitation to attend church is likely to be shooed away with the righteous declaration: "I'm at divine worship right now; don't interrupt me!"

This argument confuses many people. It confused the editors who published Mr. Pollock's article. They observed that here is a man who "does not stay away from church because he is irreligious," and Mr. Pollock let it be known that he was in fact too religious to be a good churchman. Said he: "Most of us have not 'lost our religion'; we have merely grown out of a faith confined in walls and dogmas, into something that is really part of our lives." This is a stock argument among a huge number of borderline religious cases, people who have dropped out of the church, or who have come to take it casually without breaking with it; and it is calculated to melt down ecclesiastical indignation. If an angry deacon goes to see a man with the idea of beating him up for casting a stone at the church, and finds the culprit on his knees in prayer, the deacon's heat changes into bewilder-

---

<sup>1</sup>In the *American Mercury and Reader's Digest*, October, 1940.



ment. The unsuspected piety of the offender clouds the issue. But more important than that (for ecclesiastical rage is not taken seriously any more), the church quitter is saved from a sense of religious guilt.

## II

One very significant thing about Mr. Pollock's article is that only "liberalized" Protestants are confused by his position, and that no one but a dissident Protestant would ever have written it.

Any Roman Catholic who washes his hands of the church recognizes that he is also washing his hands of everything rightly known as religion. When he exchanges his rosary for a set of golf clubs, dispenses with mass to go hiking, fishing, or picnicking, he doesn't kid himself by calling his enjoyment of the expedition "worship." For Catholics, in contrast to Protestants, have an explicit doctrine on this matter. According to their teaching, the church supplies something necessary to worship which the individual standing alone, even though it be upon the brink of the Grand Canyon, cannot himself supply. That needful thing is the mystery or miracle of the mass, where the bread and wine on the altar are transformed into the body and blood of the dying yet deathless God. In order for a sure, genuine and complete Christian worship to take place, one must be a witness of this miracle.

It is not necessary to accept the rationale of this teaching—and none but Catholics do accept it—in order to appreciate its practical worth and wisdom. One virtue is that it is clear and definite, so simple that a ten year-old child can grasp it. Another virtue is that it removes all doubt about the function and importance of the church, making that institution obviously necessary to the profession and practice of the Christian religion. For another thing, it provides some objective guide and standard in a subjective realm of human experience.

Worship is kept from being defined entirely in terms of feeling, an inconstant and variable thing. Worship is also an act, and when the emotions hesitate or fail to respond adequately before the divine, the will can carry on alone. Nor is the individual allowed a riotous freedom in naming his pleasant emotional experiences anything he chooses. Why should a man be permitted to call his moment of joy before the rising sun Christian worship, when it may be only sun worship, or a sense of animal well-being known

to every beast of the forest and bird of the air? The church guards against this mistaken identification by setting our worshipful feelings within a Christian frame of reference. To be sure, the church cannot guarantee a Christian content to the worshiper's experience; but by insisting that it is the house of worship, or at least the chief house of worship, it can provide a Christian form for worship. And none but the most anarchic romanticists deny the importance of form.

Protestants cannot accept the Roman Catholic concept of the church as a sacerdotal institution. To do so would deny the essential Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. But the problem is: does there exist, or can there exist, in Protestantism a compelling idea of the church which makes that institution necessary to the profession and practice of the Christian religion? Does there exist within the Protestant idea of the church as an organic body of Christian believers any fact, reality or doctrine requiring individual Christians to be responsible churchmen and to participate dutifully in the corporate worship of the church? If not, the Protestant church must eventually cease to be a church, disintegrating into a conglomeration of unbound, discrete, isolated individuals.

It is not enough simply to claim that churches are institutionally, sociologically or politically necessary—that is, necessary as instruments for the maintenance and propagation of Christianity in the world, for that argument places no imperative on any particular individual to be a responsible churchman. Churches must be religiously necessary, else any man can evade them with a light heart and without bothering to fortify himself against them with a stubborn spirit. One can accept an institutional justification of the church as a sound sociological proposition, and yet feel personally free to slip out and be religious on his own, leaving to more pedestrian souls the burden of carrying the institution along. For the church to be vitally necessary, it must be necessary to *my* religion, not simply for the world's religion.

Can there, or does there, exist within Protestantism an affirmation of such a necessity, without lugging in or leaning upon anything alien to Protestantism, without denying, destroying or cramping Protestantism's undoubted genius? I am sure that such an affirmation does exist in the practical needs of the religious



life. There is an "empirical" basis for maintaining that the church contributes something indispensable to the quickening, strengthening and maturing of one's religious life, something the individual cannot by himself alone supply. In the practical nature of the case, there are at least four things needful to religious life and growth which only the church, and especially the church service of worship, can give.

### III

First, there is the *sense of togetherness in God and before God*. In naming this thing it is most important not to stop with the word "togetherness," for any and every sort of group can achieve that. A mob achieves it in high degree. The sense of togetherness necessary to Christian living has a peculiar sacramental and worshipful character, and a special point of reference. It is a sense of being together in God as the common Father, and of living before him as the ultimate Judge of all things good and bad, true and false.

This thing has also been called a sense of *creatureliness*, meaning an awareness of ourselves as constituting one member (and only one member) of the vast human family of fellow-creatures who share a common and equal citizenship in the divine; who derive from and depend upon the same great source of life and grace; who are all "in the same boat" with regard to the elemental and quintessential things; who are equally humbled and equally cherished by the Father of us all; who have the same fundamental need and frailty and problem. Indeed, this is the fact, the great truth, we join together to recognize and realize when we come together to worship. And when we achieve this sense, how much in us is quickened, and how much adhering to us is sloughed off!

Baron Friedrich von Hügel used to testify to the sense of common need and common love that came to him as he prayed through his rosary or listened to the mass while kneeling beside some Irish washerwoman. Von Hügel, son of a baron of the Holy Roman Empire, scion of the most pretentious and presumptuous of aristocratic orders, member of the cultivated élite, kneeling in common need and love beside an unstationed, unlettered, unpolished, unwashed woman of toil! But no contrast at all in the things regarded by Christianity as basic and ultimate.

For these two people are recognizing their need of the same forgiveness and repentance, are performing the same act of love and devotion before a Father in whose lovingkindness each is of equal worth.

"Here," says Douglas V. Steere, "is the heart of a social gospel that is eternal."<sup>2</sup> I should prefer to say that here is the heart of an eternal gospel from which a social and personal message is ever springing. Here in this sense of togetherness in God and before him, Christianity's mandates of love, justice and brotherhood are quickened and reinforced in the worshiper. Someone has described it by comparing men to the spokes of a wheel. As they are brought nearer in worship to their center in God, they are brought nearer to each other, and each is made to realize that he is bound to the common life of his fellows by a tie he cannot break. If the worship is real, this sense of spiritual community will invade the existing community and tend to break down the barriers there. A Baron von Hügel will treat his washerwoman as a fellow-creature, and will act towards her from some other standpoint than that of his lordship.

#### IV

A second thing needful supplied by the church, and especially by the church service of worship, is the *edifying word*. The word which reminds us of moral-spiritual truth we have forgotten; the word which opens new truth to us; the word which stimulates, kindles and commands us in a moral-spiritual way; the word which has leaven in it for the active hearer, the hungry listener; the word which has the power to build up a fallen spirit, a tottering faith, a crumbled courage; the word which marks off the true from the false, and indicts that which should be put aside or swept away. These are the words in the scriptures, the hymns, the prayers, and—it is hoped—in the sermon.

Except for the sermon and, to some extent, the prayers, these words do not represent the wisdom or the creation of one person, the one who leads the worship. The words spoken in any one service derive from twenty sources, known and unknown, ancient, medieval and modern. The hymns may come from George Herbert, Charles Wesley, Isaac Watts, Frederick L. Hosmer, and

<sup>2</sup>In his *Prayer and Worship*, a Hazen book, from which I have learned and appropriated much.



that most fertile author of all, Anonymous. The scriptures may come from Isaiah, the Psalms, St. Paul and St. Francis. The prayers may come from Rabbi Hillel, St. Chrysostom, Archbishop Cranmer and James Martineau. It is not one limited man, the leader of the worship lifted up to the false position of an oracle (though there are truly individual inspirations being continually added to this collectivity), saying to the congregation: "Listen to me; it is my personal opinion that such and such a thing is true and righteous and holy." No, the words of the service are spoken by the great religious community to the individual seeker. They are words derived from a vast common store of wisdom and insight, tested words, words that have survived because of their proven power.

No one can predict how, when, or upon whom, these words will act. Often they fall among thorns, by the roadside, and upon stony ground. Sometimes they amount to no more than mummary, just as the process of "education" frequently functions as a diploma mill. There is no magic or any sure-fire and fool-proof device among the instruments of worship. No definite predictions can be made about edifying words. When young Francis of Assisi attended mass in the ruined little chapel of St. Mary of the Angels, he had heard and read the tenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel many times before. But on one particular day, the seventh to the tenth verses burst into flame within his mind: "And as you go about, preach and proclaim, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!' Cure the sick . . . Give without payment . . . and do not carry two shirts." When Francis heard those words that day, he knew he had found his rule of life. For the first time they spoke to him with a divine accent.

When Raskolnikoff, the murderer in Dostoievsky's *Crime and Punishment*, demanded that Sonia the harlot read something to him . . . read anything, but read! . . . no one would have guessed that her selection from St. John of the story of Lazarus being raised from the dead might have given to both of them the hope and the conviction that they too could be raised out of the depths into which they had fallen. But that is exactly what the story accomplished.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>This fictional illustration is given an extra touch of realism by the character of Dostoievsky, its author. He was an epitome of Raskolnikoff, or of

This emphasis upon the edifying word is conspicuously Protestant, but by no means exclusively so. Not only were the two instances cited from Catholic sources, one Roman and the other Greek, but long before there were Protestant, Roman or Greek divisions of Christendom, St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "If I come back to you and speak in unknown tongues, what good will I do you? . . . In public worship I would rather say five words with my understanding, so as to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in an ecstasy."<sup>4</sup> An appreciation of St. Paul's point of view is ever and anon cropping out in Roman Catholicism. The Franciscan movement of the thirteenth century made much of the ministration of preaching. So strongly did St. Bonaventura, a member of that order, feel about the kindling power of the understood word, that he could declare, without losing his standing:<sup>5</sup> "A people grows up far more irreligious who are without preaching than those without sacraments." Today there is a growing movement in the Roman church to let the layman share in the mass with his understanding, by providing him with a translation of its words, by making a place for congregational responses, and by a limited use of the vernacular upon the part of the celebrating priest. A book, with ecclesiastical approval, has recently appeared in this country on the subject, not simply encouraging this movement, but encouraging it for the specific purpose of reinvigorating corporate worship in the Roman Catholic church.<sup>6</sup>

## V

A third contribution of the church to religious living is *fellowship*, a thing not too easy to find in a positive and active sense these days, but a thing necessary if we are to reach the spiritual maturity that lies within our capacity. The result of trying to be a self-sufficient worshiper, of trying to be religious entirely on one's own, of trying to maintain contact with the spiritual realm in solitariness, is almost certain to be a worship arrested at an immature level, a stunted religious life, a shriveled spiritual strength. The effort to climb Godward all by oneself is apt to be

---

the whole Karamazov family, a combined saint and demon, who continually read the New Testament, and whose light obviously derived from Biblical and Christian liturgical sources.

<sup>4</sup>See I Corinthians 14:1-19.

<sup>5</sup>He had his troubles with the church, but was canonized by it.

<sup>6</sup>Gerald Ellard, *Men at Work at Worship*, Longmans, 1940.



not strenuously undertaken. Moreover it suggests the man in Munchausen's tale who extricated himself from a swamp by pulling upward on his beard.

Henri-Frédéric Amiel, professor of moral philosophy at the Academy of Geneva, one of the mountainous intellects of the nineteenth century, attempted to do this, and all that his labors brought forth were a few delicate mice. Near the beginning of his career he confessed to the pages of his intimate *Journal* as follows: "Still I miss something, a common worship, a positive religion, shared with other people. Ah! when will the church to which I belong in heart rise into being? I cannot content myself with being in the right all alone. I must have a less solitary Christianity. My religious needs are not satisfied any more than my social needs, or my needs of affection. Generally I am able to forget them and lull them to sleep. But at times they wake up with a sort of painful bitterness . . . I waver between languor and satiety, between frittering myself away on the infinitely little, and longing after what is unknown and distant."<sup>7</sup>

Thirty years later, when Amiel came to die, he had progressed no further. He was still alone, trying to live as if he were God's only child. He was still filled with painful bitterness and emptiness, still fluttering in the cage of spiritual solitariness, and he had frittered himself away on the infinitely little. He was a colossal moral and spiritual failure, because he never broke the bars of his own selfhood and escaped into the freedom of fellowship.

I suspect a good many people have repeated that pattern on a smaller scale. At one time or another they have had religious "openings," insights, visions, persuasions which might well have passed from a brief bloom into the ripe fruit of spiritual power; but without the nourishment, without the stimulation, without the encouragement and guidance, without the mutual exchanges of religious fellowship, these spiritual possibilities became mere pressed flowers in a melancholy book of memories. Imagine a scientist trying to accomplish a significant work in isolation from other scientists, refusing to share his experience with, refusing to draw upon the work of, other scientists, attempting to live and

---

<sup>7</sup>Entry for April 26, 1852, when Amiel was thirty-one years of age. *Amiel's Journal*, trans. Mrs. Humphrey Ward, Home Library Edition, New York, p. 24.

work as if he were science's only devotee. He might achieve something entirely on his own; but it would be only a fraction of what he might have achieved in fellowship with other scientists. It is the same in religion.

## VI

A fourth contribution of the church to religious living is the *consciousness of historical continuity*, the gift of a *living tradition*. The spiritual adventure does not begin with you, nor will it end with you. It is an ancient as well as a modern quest, rich in tradition, and (for Christians of the present day) set within a movement of life flowing continuously through three thousand years of history. "With all this host of witnesses encircling us," says the *Letter to the Hebrews*, referring to the great men of the past, "we are not the men to shrink back and be lost, but to have faith and so to win our souls." The Christian worshiper in the visible church is made aware of his membership in the vaster church invisible, where the souls of the living and the dead share one godly communion, where the record shines with triumphs over defeats, where the torch is seen being passed from one generation to another to be held aloft.

If this sounds like a feeble sentimentality—as well it may to many uprooted children of the twentieth century, who are immersed in the contemporary, who discredit everything of day-before-yesterday without bothering to learn what it was, and who regard tradition as possessing only a dead hand—it might be instructive to note how quickly the hard-boiled boys of revolutionary movements transplant moss upon their innovations, dig up a pantheon of old heroes, and present themselves to their subjects as the essence of ancient wine, freshly distilled and put up in new bottles. Or, consider it in terms of patriotism. What would patriotism mean, if it had no living tradition, no consciousness of historical continuity? Suppose we had no "pilgrim fathers" in our national memory, no knowledge of any Declaration of Independence, no remembered "shot heard round the world," no memorial of any heroic struggles, of any noble characters, or of any great community accomplishments. If that were the case, patriotism would lack vitality; indeed, there wouldn't be such a thing worth the name in a time of crisis.

Likewise, how much less power Christianity would have in

people's lives without its living tradition—without the biblical record, the history of the church, the witness of the saints, the testimony of the prophets, the example of the heroes, the "backing of the dead."

## VII

These four needful things—the sense of togetherness in God and before him, the edifying word, the religious fellowship, the living tradition—are contributed by the church, the organized group of believers and worshipers, the self-conscious religious community. They are things which the individual himself, standing alone, cannot supply.

It should be recognized, however, that these observations do not even touch upon some of the important questions about the church, its nature and function. They supply a practical doctrine of the church which makes that institution clearly necessary to all sincere religious seekers and professors. That much is important. It resolves some doubts and confusions, and makes one form of religious self-deception more difficult. It provides an argument with which to confront the backsliding layman—if he hasn't "slid" too far. It constitutes a good tonic for the parson enervated by doubts of the worthiness of his professional work—provided he is not completely demoralized.

But a practical, rational or empirical doctrine of the church has its limitations, derives its power from premises already given. It can strengthen the faith, loyalty and responsibility of those who have some faith *et cetera* to strengthen. It is a sufficient doctrine for those described by Pascal when he said, "You would not have sought God if you had not already found him," or felt inclined towards him. Undoubtedly, the chief reason for the feebler loyalty elicited by the church today is not foggy thinking about the importance of the church, but an increased disbelief in the value of the Christian religion itself. That is quite another problem.

Does a pragmatic doctrine of the church give that institution any respectful standing among the unawakened, the unenlisted, the non-religious, the irreligious and the heathen? Is such a conception enough to give the church a position in history such as it has occupied in the past? Probably not. At any rate, the church in its great days was justified by doctrines that went far beyond



empiricism and rationalism, and those institutions now seeking to replace the church—the Most Sacred Party, the Superior Race, the Totalitarian State—justify themselves with doctrines that are theological, metaphysical, mystical—anything but rational and empirical.

Gaius Glenn Atkins says there are five meanings of the word *church*.<sup>8</sup> First of all, there is St. Paul's "Church", "which has persisted across almost two thousand years, and is now reasserting itself even amongst those for whom it had grown dim and distant." That is the conception of the church as the Body of Christ.<sup>9</sup> "Without this church," says Dr. Atkins, "we should not have any of the others." It is "the church about which theologians speculate and churchmen argue: the very natural desire to possess it exclusively has set godly men at bitter odds." But it is also "the church which sustains faith, commands loyalties and corrects the fugitive by the enduring. It has saved Christianity from being bodyless; it has saved the historical church from being no more than an aspect of its times, and from being lost in them. It is one source of the perpetual renewal of Christian ardor. It asserts its spell even over those who have no connection with the church, and in seasons of extremity or despair turns them toward the church for deliverance as unto a power not of this world, which cannot perish with a perishing civilization, or allow civilization itself to perish."

I myself doubt the possibility of actually recapturing St. Paul's concept of the church. But I am convinced that we need a concept of the church which, like St. Paul's, places men in history in contact with something beyond history as well as within it.

---

<sup>8</sup>"The Existential Church," *Christendom*, Autumn, 1940.

<sup>9</sup>No effort to interpret the meaning of this concept will be made here, because it is not simply a figure of speech but a mythos which has undergone various interpretations in the course of Christian history. To translate it into modern terminology would be a special task in itself.

## Kierkegaard's Existential System

GEORG J. M. WALLEN

Of the three great dissenters against nineteenth century optimism, two of them, Dostoievsky and Nietzsche, have for more than half a century occupied the attention of the informed public in nearly all civilized countries. The third, Kierkegaard, has been least known, and certainly least understood. The revival of interest in his life and work in general and his philosophy of religion in particular, in Germany since the beginning of the century, and in the Latin and Anglo-Saxon countries in recent years, is an event of more than passing significance. This revival can hardly be attributed to any particular theological school, or to any particular theologian or philosopher. It is true that men like Barth, Brunner, and Heidegger among others, by their special interest in the life and work of Kierkegaard, have helped to make the name of Kierkegaard known in academic circles as well as in small groups of informed people outside these circles. The real question arises: Why the renewed interest in Kierkegaard at this particular time, a revival which is, in the case of most students of his works, virtually a discovery? It can hardly be argued that this is accidental, that it is due to the fact that Kierkegaard expressed his thoughts originally in the Danish language and thus could expect to reach only a very limited audience. Why then these belated translations of his works? No, one is compelled to seek for causes of vastly greater significance,—in the trends of thought which have gained momentum in the last decades. These new directions find their expression in an increasing lack of faith in man and in his ability to approach a solution to the problems of the modern world. More specifically, causative factors, such as the terrifying contradictions in the social and cultural environment, are today more clearly perceived and inwardly experienced than they were only a decade or two ago. These are contradictions of the human soul, between inquiry and futility, between the ideal and the real, between authority and freedom, between good will and demonic forces of primeval origin, between cosmos and chaos. Kierkegaard would say that man stands before an abyss, between life and eternity, and thus his

position is irrevocably the same in all ages and all cultures. Perhaps, then, it is significant that, after a hundred years of relentless advance of the machine, its inner contradictions are at last becoming inwardly experienced, and we sense the chaos that threatens modern civilization. There may be no reason to believe that the dissenters from nineteenth century optimism clearly foresaw the disintegration of the soulless rationalistic processes embodied in the modern machine, but we do know that, for one of them at least, even in an age of mechanical progress, there was only one question that remained important: How do I exist, and how am I related to my Creator?—the sole question of Kierkegaard.

If what we have said constitutes the background on which an understanding and appreciation of Kierkegaard ought to be approached, it follows that he cannot easily be classified, pigeonholed, as it were. He was neither this nor that, and would have passionately resisted any effort to identify him with any particular branch of theology or school of philosophy. He was a humble soul who, with all his might, inquired into the meaning of his own subjective existence, and who, only for the sake of orientation, compared his findings with the dogma he found in the Christian Church, both Protestant and Catholic. Thus, it may be said that the representatives of the Crisis Theology are hardly more justified in relating Kierkegaard to Luther and Calvin than are Catholic writers, notably Theodore Haecker, in relating him to Newman and Pascal. Equally strong arguments may be advanced in favor of his spiritual relationship to Channing and the Socinian position, but whoever wishes to "prove" such a lineage will have to strain certain interpretations of Kierkegaard's teachings concerning the paradox of reason. Nevertheless, such "proof" meets far greater strain when Lutheran and Crisis theologians attempt to identify him with the Absolute Word of God, or when the Catholic, Haecker, tries to force on him the absolute Church and the sacraments of Rome. Such efforts are futile and even dangerous, and at best do little else but set forth the particular position or religious predilection of the interpreter. The tendency to dogmatize one's own position has, in most cases, sufficient impetus without the coerced support of Kierkegaard. But the entire situation is curious in this respect, that he, to whom subjectivity in religion was the sole passion of life, should in turn become an object of theological "sub-



jectivism"; and the situation is also ironical, for Kierkegaard had nothing but scorn for the professional theologian.

From the standpoint of the philosophy of religion there are two works in particular in which Kierkegaard develops his thesis: "Subjectivity is truth." Those two works are *Philosophical Fragments*, published in the year 1844 when Kierkegaard was only thirty-two years old, and its sequel, *Unscientific Postscript*, published two years later. The thesis that Kierkegaard develops in his *Philosophical Fragments*, which leads up to his teaching of "subjectivity is truth," and which lies at the heart of his existential system, he expresses as follows: "Is an historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness; how can such a departure have any other than a merely historical interest; is it possible to rest one's hope of eternal blessedness upon historical knowledge?" This question involves, of course, the broader aspect of truth, which, in turn, implies a theory of knowledge. Two phases of his theory of knowledge should be clearly distinguished. The first pertains to the Socratic theory of reminiscence<sup>1</sup>, the second to Kierkegaard's teachings about the paradox of reason. Because his entire analysis of historical truth, and consequently his central thesis that "subjectivity is truth," is based on conclusions arrived at in his analysis of the Socratic theory of reminiscence as well as on postulates accepted in his teaching about the paradox of reason, it follows that these two phases of his theory of knowledge must first be presented.

With Socrates, who to Kierkegaard represented humanism in its unadulterated form, he distinguishes between the twofold aspect of truth, the temporal and the eternal. Socrates, according to Kierkegaard, recognizes only temporal truth as having validity. Eternal truth is beyond man's power to perceive. For to perceive it one must have the characteristics or attributes of a timeless, absolute element, that is, one must be God. Socrates is therefore consistent when he insists that he does not give the truth to his disciples, but merely draws it out, and he is thoroughly honest when he wants no fee for his teaching. Now it is true that Socrates spoke about God, but it was a God limited by the deductions drawn

---

<sup>1</sup>Kierkegaard uses the word *Erindring*, German *Erinnerung*. The word is used in a very general way. Socrates is used symbolically.

from his theory of reminiscence and hence subject to the same relativism as any other object of man's search for truth. In other words, the principle of man as the measure of all things is the final criterion of its function and value. Kierkegaard admits, and this is an important point about which I shall have more to say later, that the Socratic position might be the only one ultimately tenable. But he adds rather significantly, that if one cannot go further than Socrates, he has nothing of importance to say, for to express in a more feeble manner what Socrates has already expressed so brilliantly, does indeed seem to be senseless.

Thus we come to the second phase of Kierkegaard's theory of knowledge as it is developed in *Philosophical Fragments*. I refer to his teaching about the paradox of reason. Parenthetically, it may be said that it is this phase of Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion that so easily lends support to the teachings of the Crisis theologians. Admittedly, his dialectic is far-reaching in its implications. It is, indeed, a perplexing question to determine to what extent his teaching about the paradox of reason is related to his teaching of subjectivity as truth. Clearly, and from the standpoint of deductive processes, they are inseparably interwoven, as we shall have occasion to observe in developing his central thesis on subjectivity as truth. But the question arises: to what extent are they related to the positive elements of Kierkegaard's religion, that is, to his teachings about the power of love as expressed in his sermons? On this point it is only fair to say that interpreters of Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion differ sharply. Here we shall note that in his many sermons as well as in his devotional writings in general, he avoids the transcendent element of orthodox Christianity and explores the realm of immanent religiosity. This is an important point to be borne in mind. For in Kierkegaard's teaching about the paradox of reason it is indeed easy to go off on a tangent. Thus Christianity may be reduced *ad absurdum* on the one hand and, on the other, become essentially reactionary and absolutistic. Under no circumstance can Kierkegaard be held responsible for either of these perversions.

More specifically, Kierkegaard states his position on the paradox of reason as follows: "The supreme passion of reason is to seek a collision, although the collision is causative in one way or another

to its own annihilation.<sup>2</sup> This then is the supreme paradox of all thought, to want to discover something that is beyond its limits. This passion of reason is to be found in all aspects of human thinking." Thus, man cannot, from the standpoint of reason, know God, nor can he know himself in any real sense. Kierkegaard says, with frank understatement, that to prove the existence of anything from the standpoint of reason is not an easy matter! It follows that reason, according to Kierkegaard, finds itself in a hopeless dilemma when it attempts to understand the nature of truth and the nature of the truth-seeking process.

It does not appear that he was very familiar with Kant's critical philosophy. It was perhaps in his opposition to Hegel's identification of thought with being that he came unknowingly to take Kant's critical position, so far as his theory of knowledge is concerned. On the other hand, he was familiar with the monistic philosophy of Spinoza and remarks that Spinoza commits the same error as Hegel when he, from his God-concept, deduces Being, not as an attribute of thought, but as its essence. On the whole, his position may be expressed with Kant when he says that thought cannot be identified with being. But, since the only question that is important to Kierkegaard is: How do I as an individual exist, and how am I related to my Creator?, it follows that, if no other element than that which is involved in reason enters in, man is lost. Inquiry is futile. It can go no further, and thus reason finds itself checkmated. Is there nothing, then, to which man can hold? Does not Christianity speak about an object appearing in time, an historical event, yet timeless? These are the questions that disturb Kierkegaard. While his ceaseless and ponderous inquiry may seem artificial at times, yet, if its essential elements are clearly perceived and, even more, inwardly experienced, they become stuff out of which genuine religious *Lebensgefühl* arises.

It is true that certain trends of religious liberalism follow an empirical approach to the fundamental questions of man and religion, and thus Kierkegaard's dialectical approach may seem to many liberals strange and even irrelevant. Yet, it may be argued that the empirical approach itself, when it is faced with the problem of knowledge in religion, must either reduce it to "emotive" signifi-

---

<sup>2</sup>The word here used in the original is *Undergang*, German, *Untergang*. Professor Swenson translates it, "downfall."



cance and thus deny it verifiability, or else to mere psychological or sociological significance. Even should this be the so-called scientific approach to the study of religion, it would have no effect on Kierkegaard's position. For he would insist that man's subjective existence is a question that goes beyond these approaches. It is the relationship of the individual to subjective existence that is the determining and underlying question. It follows that science of religion is a misnomer, in other words, science is forever limited to the externalities of religion. It follows also that, in a strict sense, there is no scientific theology.

The question which Kierkegaard asks in his *Fragments*, "Is an historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness?" now takes on an increasingly important significance. For it will be observed that he goes definitely beyond Socrates and humanism. But it should also be observed, that in closing the *Fragments*, he says that, although his thesis is an advancement upon Socrates, it cannot be decided definitely that it is more true than his position. This point should be noted, for it clearly indicates that there are two parallel lines of thought, one being based on his teaching of the paradox of reason and the absolute paradox which is the object appearing in time; the other on general religious experience. From whatever position one views his conception of the historical element of Christianity as he sets it forth in *Unscientific Postscript*, the sequel to the *Fragments*, it is decidedly unorthodox, if by orthodoxy we mean the view that bases its doctrine of salvation on certain definite historical happenings. Even Bohlin, a Lutheran theologian and a Kierkegaardian scholar from the Lutheran point of view, sees clearly that Kierkegaard is downright heretical in his interpretation of the historical element of Christianity, particularly in his implicit rejection of the doctrine of sin as held by the Lutheran Church. The important question is, of course, how far and to what degree *Fragments* and *Unscientific Postscript* present Kierkegaard's basic position with regard to the historical element of Christianity. This is an inclusive question. Personally, I should be willing to defend the thesis that the two works constitute his basic position. It would lead too far afield, however, to give this subject a full treatment here.

The paradox of reason, and the position of Socrates, drive Kierkegaard to inquire into the nature of faith. His approach seems to be to search for some causative factor that drives reason

to inquiry, even though it clearly sees the contradiction of all inquiry. Since this passion of reason cannot be explained by reason, it must be motivated by some external agency. Kierkegaard calls this agency God; the element that brings it about is faith. Henceforth, and primarily in the sequel to the *Fragments*, his dialectics become more and more oriented to Christian dogmatic belief.<sup>3</sup> It is observed that Christianity, although it also is an historical religion, claims to take its "departure from an eternal consciousness." But he adds rather significantly in the introduction to the *Unscientific Postscript* that his problem is not so much the claimed truth of Christianity as it is the relationship of the individual to that religion, thus anticipating his general conclusion that "subjectivity is truth."

Of course, a logician of such calibre as Kierkegaard is fully aware of the fact that when he thus speaks about faith, God, and the object appearing in time (revelation), these, in turn, are objects of the same reason, or more specifically find themselves in the same problematic position as is involved in the principle of the paradox of reason. In other words, there is always a lurking humanism behind his dialectics. I have noted this before and it is a point that cannot easily be dodged. However, we shall never be able to get at the root of that question, for it is one of the secrets that he alone could reveal and that, probably, he never would reveal. It is sufficient to know that he went to extreme lengths to set forth the futility of life as lived by merely humanistic standards. What is supreme for Kierkegaard is "to will the collision," which implies a final decision with the definite assurance that from an eternal point of view faith is prior to reason. It is from this standpoint that his analysis of the historical element of the Christian religion achieves its real significance. The fact, however, that Kierkegaard shows a vacillating as well as a digressive attitude toward the classical, orthodox doctrine of Christian revelation, does indicate quite clearly the priority in his thinking of the individual subjective consciousness over dogma. Of course, from the standpoint of common sense, "the object appearing in time" (revelation), if it can be historically validated, has an antecedent existence in relation to subjective individual consciousness. On the

---

<sup>3</sup>"*Problemet har faat en Historisk Kostume*," literally translated means, "The problem has acquired an historical costume." Historical costume implies dogmatic teachings and beliefs.

other hand, such antecedent existence is non-existent from the standpoint of temporal sequences, because that which was no longer is. Thus, if it exists, it exists for the individual consciousness alone in the present. Here, then, is a dilemma quite real from the standpoint of dialectics, perhaps artificial from the standpoint of an empirical approach to the philosophy of religion, if indeed there can be an empirical approach.

Kierkegaard's position as to the data of Christian revelation, that is historical truth, timeless and eternal, as he expresses it, may be stated as follows: he observes first that, if the individual is to base his hope for eternal happiness on historical truth, it must be of a *particular* character. He observes that in Protestant religion and theology the Bible plays such a part. In this connection, it should be noted that he does not underestimate the work of the Biblical scholars and the philologists, for he sees that their work has a close bearing upon objective truth as it has appeared in time. But it has only a bearing upon it. Indeed, it may serve as an obstruction. The more scientific the scholar, the more callous he is to the religious implications of the subject-matter with which he deals. The theologian, on the other hand, is not callous. But he is concerned about a system of salvation, and his tendency is to objectify and intellectualize it so as to make it stand apart from the individual. Now Kierkegaard holds that, regardless of the merits of the system, regardless of the brilliance of the philologist and the keenness and profundity of the theologian, the philologist and the theologian must be satisfied to limit themselves to an approximation of that which is objectively true. But the individual cannot build his hope for eternal happiness on merely an approximate truth. It follows that the authenticity of the Bible has no meaning except as an object of faith for the individual. Thus we arrive at the fuller significance of his statement that "subjectivity is truth." When it is seen in his entire scheme, when it is inwardly experienced, it becomes an object not only worthy of our attention, but also a resting point for our religious consciousness.

We see then that, according to Kierkegaard, no eternal blessedness can be founded upon historical knowledge; that the point of departure must forever be the individual and his soul life. To substantiate his thesis, Kierkegaard discusses at length those everlasting, perplexing metaphysical riddles which are involved in temporal sequences: the idea of is, was, and becoming. His posi-



tion is that historical knowledge of the past is not possible from the standpoint of reason. The world of yesterday is as unreal as the world of tomorrow. Thus, he says, "There is no more power of proof in the testimony of eighteen-hundred years than in the testimony of yesterday, with respect to truth of a decisive nature on which my hope of eternal blessedness may rest. God cannot help it if habit, carelessness, affectation, and gossiping with one's neighbors, in the course of time corrupt most people so that they become thoughtless and thus rest their hope of eternal blessedness on this or that externality." Thus the Church as the custodian of revealed truth comes in for the same "merciless dialectical punishment" as do the theologians with their "holy writ." His general conclusion is, here as elsewhere, that whoever has objective Christianity and nothing else is, *co ipse*, a pagan, for Christianity is nothing but an affair of the spirit, of the relationship of the individual to his subjective state, of his own passion and search for ultimate values.

Needless to say, the above analysis is only a partial one. The aim of this paper is a limited one, that of attempting to clarify the important phases of Kierkegaard's existential system as it finds its most complete expression in the statement, "subjectivity is truth." It is entirely possible to know a great deal about the life and works of Kierkegaard, and yet fail to grasp the essential elements of his philosophy of religion. Even more, it is entirely possible to read one or two of his works, as they now appear in translations, and yet secure a distorted conception of his teachings. Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms is such as to lead the uninitiated to confusion, for not infrequently positions are set forth that are not Kierkegaard's own. However, it is my definite opinion that his teaching about "subjectivity is truth" lies at the heart of his existential system and consequently of his philosophy of religion. Thus, whoever understands the significance of his teaching about subjectivity, not merely from the standpoint of a logical analysis of it, but equally from the standpoint of experience, has grasped the essential part of Kierkegaard's contribution to the world of thought and religion.

There can be little doubt that the Christianity advocated by Kierkegaard and that to which he consecrated his life is impossible to attain. The question concerns essentially the potency and workability of ideals. To Höffding, Kierkegaard appears to have shown the real nature of Christianity, but as such it is a Christianity with which he can admittedly have little or nothing to do. For it must

be clearly understood that Kierkegaard's subjectivity has its own peculiar objectivity, for when the subjective quest reaches its highest potentiality, in the sense that man recognizes not only that he will never be able to get away from it, but also that he completely surrenders to it, it becomes objective and final for him. As such it makes its own demands on the individual, demands that are unconditional. From the standpoint of life lived on an ordinary human level, and admittedly we cannot speak about it otherwise, these unconditional demands, and to Kierkegaard they are God's demands, are unattainable and therefore unacceptable. Kierkegaard himself, however, was faithful to the demands to a remarkable degree. On his deathbed he refused the sacraments. When a friend of his visited him in his last days, expressing the hope that he ought to live longer so as to retract his bitter criticism of external or orthodox Christianity, Kierkegaard replied: "No, no, you do not understand what you are saying." "You must remember," he added on another occasion, "that I have seen things from the very heart of Christianity."

*The publishers of Philosophic Abstracts take  
pleasure in announcing for Summer 1941  
publication*

## THE DICTIONARY OF PHILOSOPHY

Although embraced in one volume, the dictionary covers metaphysics, ethics, epistemology, logic, philosophy of religion, esthetics, philosophy of law, philosophy of education, social philosophy and philosophical psychology. Special emphasis has been placed on the definition of basic concepts and terms germane to the contemporary schools of philosophy, logical positivism, dialectical materialism, mathematical logic, neo-scholasticism, philosophy of science, Chinese, Jewish and Indian philosophy.

The DICTIONARY OF PHILOSOPHY is edited by Dagobert D. Runes with the collaboration of Alonzo Church, Rudolf Carnap, G. Watts Cunningham, Edgar Sheffield Brightman, Irwin Edman, Rudolf Allers, A. C. Ewing, Ralph Tyler Flewelling, Jorgen Jorgensen, Ledger Wood, William Marias Malisoff, Carl G. Hempel, B. A. G. Fuller, A. Cornelius Benjamin, Hunter Guthrie, Wilbur Long, V. J. McGill, A. C. Pegis, Glenn R. Morrow, Joseph Ratner, Wendell T. Bush, Dorion Cairns, James K. Feibleman, Paul A. Schillp, Paul Weiss and a number of other scholars.

*Applications for further literature, as well as  
other communications, should be addressed to:*

**PHILOSOPHIC ABSTRACTS**

15 East 40th Street

New York City

# Humanism versus Humanists

ARCHIE J. BAHM

Humanism is a doctrine upon which all Humanists agree. Humanists are persons or personalities. Each Humanist is a unique combination of traits, attitudes, viewpoints. Not every view of every Humanist is a part of Humanism. That upon which Humanists agree, i.e., that which constitutes Humanism, is a very limited sort of agreement. There is danger in reading too much into Humanism. There is danger in reading into Humanism any additional doctrine of any Humanist.

The limited amount required for agreement allows for a relatively wide appeal that Humanism can have. But at the same time, wideness of appeal lends itself to wideness of interpretation. And Humanists, like all other religious people, oftentimes are unable to distinguish between their Humanist and their non-Humanist doctrines. They pass off upon the unsuspecting various views of their own as bona fide Humanism and easily convince themselves of the same.

Since Humanists differ as persons, the doctrine of differences among Humanists ought to be part of Humanism. Their differences with regard to some problems ought to be as different as their social, cultural and individual experiences, and their theories should be as different as their religious practices.

With such widely divergent sets of views being held by Humanists, it is unlikely that the area of agreement could be large. Even *The Humanist Manifesto* said too much. Some of its contentions have been contested and a feeling is abroad that revision is needed. As long as each Humanist wants details of his own viewpoint incorporated in "official doctrine," there will be quarreling and dissatisfaction. Critics of Humanism will have an easy time attacking its superfluities and will appear to demolish it when really they are attacking its non-essentials. There is a solid core of Humanism which need not be adulterated by personal additions of its outspoken leaders.

Some Humanists are Unitarians, but Unitarianism is not essential to Humanism. Some Humanists are atheists, but atheism is not essential to Humanism. Some Humanists are Naturalists, but Naturalism is not essential to Humanism. Some are socialists, some are pacifists, some are Christians, perhaps some are vegetarians; but socialism, pacifism, Christianity and vegetarianism are not essential to Humanism. Let Humanists be wary of identifying Humanism with viewpoints which are clearly consistent with it.

If Humanists are not clear about their agreements as Humanists, they are likely to fall apart. When one Humanist is attacked by a critic, other Humanists will not come to his rescue if his version of Humanism is different from theirs. Humanists will develop "minority problems." Each will call the other a "fifth columnist." Critics will set one against another and give sufficient support to their conflict until they fall fighting among themselves. For any group clearly conscious of its unity, external criticism strengthens, internal dissention destroys. Humanism's greatest enemies are not its critics, but Humanists.



## Recent Unitariana

Nothing I have seen of recent publications in the field of Unitarian historiography has so touched and impressed me as the work of a Roman Catholic priest, Daniel T. McColgan, of the arch-diocese of Boston, on *Joseph Tuckerman, Pioneer in American Social Work*.<sup>1</sup> Obviously Doctor McColgan in the midst of parochial social work in the capital city of the Unitarian movement, came to the realization that just a century ago another religious humanitarian had extended his parish ministry into a wider field of effort and vision, a ministry-at-large, dedicated in Doctor Tuckerman's phrase, "Deo et Christo in pauperibus." How understandingly the souls of the two men, identical in Christian spirit and premises, though outwardly diverse in ecclesiastical adherence, have spoken to each other across the years, is evident on every page of the book. We have depended hitherto upon Dr. Christopher R. Eliot's admirable monograph of Doctor Tuckerman in the *Unitarian Historical Society Proceedings* (Vol. IV, Part I, 1935), and this contains some material that Father McColgan has not included in his otherwise plenary work. But it is to the latter's book that we must now go, not only for a minute delineation of the fundamental religious motivation of Doctor Tuckerman's insights and efforts, but for (a) a hitherto unsummarized survey of Boston, specifically Unitarian humanitarianism prior to and coincident with Tuckerman's activity; (b) a beautiful record of the spiritual and practical inter-relation of Tuckerman and Channing; (c) a detailed analysis of Tuckerman's debt to Chalmers and Casper von Voght; (d) an illuminating chronicle of the humanitarian work of British Unitarianism, with which Doctor Tuckerman made acquaintance in his European travels of 1833; (e) a detailed account of all the reforms and institutions of religious philanthropy which received our subject's support and foresight; (f) a worthy memorial of the personnel and devotion of the Unitarian laymen and women who aided Tuckerman and Channing in their always expensive and usually unprecedented projects. Nor could any author, even a Unitarian, write with more profound and tender appreciation, not only of the man himself, but of his liberal convictions of the moral dignity and improvability of human nature. Scrupulous factuality, tolerance and undisguised sympathy mark every page and each appraisal. This estimate is true even of that section in which Father McColgan deals with the rise and organization of doctrinal Unitarianism. No history of our movement, so far as I am aware, offers so accurate, vivid and inclusive a picture of the "Boston of 1825" as his Chapter 5, stressing philanthropy and education especially. The author has used to the best effect the vast resources of *Unitariana* in that city's libraries.

Quite as sympathetic a study of another episode of our youth is *Liberal Kentucky, 1780-1828* by Niels Henry Sonne.<sup>2</sup> The struggle between Presbyterians and "Liberals" (Deists, Episcopalians, "Priestleyans") for control of the Transylvania University at Lexington was fierce and long, com-

<sup>1</sup>Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1940. Paper. 450 pp. \$2.50.

<sup>2</sup>New York: Columbia University Press 1939. 287 pp. \$3.00.

mencing with the brief and turbulent presidency (1794-1796) of the Priestleyan, Harry Toulmin, son of the British Unitarian minister and historian, Joshua Toulmin. After its termination through Presbyterian opposition (exacerbated by Jeffersonian-Federalist politics), the efforts of Dr. John Buchanan (natural religionist), John Bradford (Liberal Episcopalian), Colonel Henry Morrison (Deist), and others, resulted in the call of Horace Holley, the brilliant minister of Hollis Street Church in Boston, to the presidency (1815-1827). His nine years of enlightened educational policy, resulting in rapidly increasing attendance (comparable with the great development of Harvard under President Kirkland) were, however, harassed by incessant orthodox criticism, intermingled with political chicanery. After his resignation, Transylvania University sank into a sectarian sluggishness, and the state has never developed a worthy, supra-denominational university. Doctor Sonne clears Holley of various false allegations which preceding Presbyterian accounts have laid against him. The work is definitive unless another doctoral candidate, after a decent interval, feels it to be an academic duty to vindicate the Presbyterians!

This affair of Transylvania University is directly linked with similar events in Boston, since one of the chief eastern instigators of the Presbyterian attack upon Holley was Jedidiah Morse of Boston. If further evidence were needed to prove this unscrupulous fanaticism against Unitarians, it is to be found in *Jedidiah Morse, A Champion of New England Orthodoxy*,<sup>3</sup> written (we surmise) by a descendant, James King Morse, and based on many hitherto unpublished letters of Morse now at Yale and in New York City. This book, like that of Sonne, is the product of Professor Herbert W. Schneider's seminar at Columbia, where interest in Liberal religion evidently hums and thrives, (Cf. Koch, *Republican Religion*, etc.). New and valuable light is thrown upon the years from 1799 to 1819, especially upon Morse's incessant and equivocal intrigues designed virtually to force a separation of Calvinists from Liberals. If the author is a relative, he has certainly not sacrificed veracity to family pride! The ancestor Morse is revealed as determined from the first to force the issue, to penetrate by disingenuous means the councils of the Liberal Boston ministers and finally to mislead his own friends in the foundation of Andover Seminary. Forever talking tolerance and charity, he was in action hard, contentious and devious. The skeleton in the Morse family has put on several inches before it is returned to its closet!

Nothing makes me feel more like a veteran than the reflection that I can remember when Dr. Henry Wilder Foote began studying hymnody, editing hymnbooks and choosing hymns for me to sing and explaining why I should like them. Now all these years of research and experiment have brought forth *Three Centuries of American Hymnody*, and a gracefully informative volume it is!<sup>4</sup> Commencing with the background and compilation

<sup>3</sup>New York: Columbia University Press, 1939. 180 pp. \$2.50.

<sup>4</sup>Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940. 418 pp. \$4.00.

of the Bay Psalm Book which came out in 1640, it traces the evolution of the modern hymn through psalmody to poetry of intrinsic literary merit. Unitarian hymns and their authors rightfully occupy much of his attention. Liberal influence began with the compilations of Reverend Simeon Howard (West Church in Boston) of 1783 which "dropped most of the psalms and hymns of theological content." Then in 1788 came a "far better book" edited by Reverend William Bentley, who included Pope's Deistic "Universal Prayer." After Belknap's Collection of 1795 and Doctor Freeman's of 1799, the period of original Liberal authorship began with W. C. Bryant, R. W. Emerson, and the Reverend John Pierpont. It is interesting to glean from the section devoted to ante-bellum Unitarian hymns that Reverend Henry Ware, Jr. composed "Great God, the followers of thy Son" for Sparks's famous ordination of 1819. Large portions of the second half of Doctor Foote's book deal with specifically Unitarian hymns (p. 233 on). We venture to disagree with Doctor Foote on the superiority of Samuel Johnson's "City of God, how broad and fair" to Samuel Longfellow's "One Holy Church of God appears", but it is interesting to know that the former was used at the dedication of the Anglican Liverpool Cathedral in 1924, at the League of Nations Service in the Abbey (1935), at the Jubilee of George V, and at the Coronation of George VI! Another fact we are glad to see vouched for is Reverend Newton Mann's authorship (aided by Reverend W. C. Gannett) of the translation of Yigdal which we so often use.

The second volume<sup>5</sup> on the literary history of New England from the pen of Van Wyck Brooks is quite as critically and anecdotally superb as the *Flowering* but not quite so preponderantly our denominational autobiography. To be sure, the chapter on The Radical Club is invaluable for an understanding of its cognate, the Free Religious Association; but a bit less of Howells and the Adamsons and much more about Clarke and Hale and the epic struggle over evolution (Spencer, Darwin, Youmans, Fiske, Joseph Cooke, M. J. Savage) would have given a more accurate balance and verisimilitude to the later chapters. In this connection it should be added that the recent publication of extracts from the *Journals of Bronson Alcott*<sup>6</sup> and the *Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*<sup>7</sup> provide us with a vast new mine of source material for post-bellum Unitarianism. Illuminating indeed is Alcott's entry concerning the refusal of the Berry Street Conference to allow him to speak at its session of 1878 and the ensuing offer of Doctor Hedge to make him an ordained Unitarian minister—a distinction he refused!

Just a few words in conclusion in appreciation of several short treatments of our movement that have recently appeared. That of E. S. Bates in *American Faith*,<sup>8</sup> Chapter 28, is factual, penetrating, just, and appreciative.

<sup>5</sup>NEW ENGLAND, INDIAN SUMMER. By Van Wyck Brooks. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1940. 557 pp. \$3.75.

<sup>6</sup>Edited by Odell Shepard. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1938. 559 pp. \$5.00.

<sup>7</sup>Edited by Ralph L. Rusk. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939. 6 vols. \$30.00.

<sup>8</sup>New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1940. 479 pp. \$3.75: (This book was reviewed by Stephen H. Fritchman in the Autumn 1940 issue of THE JOURNAL.)



In a distinguished piece of research and lucid writing,<sup>8a</sup> Clement Eaton reviews and diagnoses the rise and decline of Unitarianism south of the Mason and Dixon Line: "The radiating centers of religious Liberalism in the Old South were those isolated Unitarian churches . . . at Charleston, Louisville and New Orleans," [yet] . . . "the fact that the Unitarian clergy were generally anti-slavery men was one cause for the failure." [But] "the key to its moribund state was that it did not satisfy the emotional needs of a rural people."

Another noble prize should be given Professor J. L. Neve, an Ohio Lutheran scholar, for his admirably accurate and appreciative interpretation of Unitarianism in *Churches and Sects of Christendom*.<sup>9</sup> But we suggest a conference on ecumenicity between Professor Neve and Professor Archibald G. Baker, Jr. as to whether Socinians, Unitarians, and Universalists should be regarded as within the pale of Christendom, for the *Short History of Christianity*<sup>10</sup> which the latter has edited contains not one reference to them! Since, however, the Bible contains no reference to Buddha, Confucius and Plato we need not be unduly offended!

The Meadville Theological School.

Charles Lyttle

## Communications

### "THE RELIGIOUS SYMBOL"

To the Editor of THE JOURNAL OF LIBERAL RELIGION:

I have read with great interest your valuable Summer issue of 1940 and have written to my good friend, Dr. Tillich, regarding his article on "The Religious Symbol." It may be of interest to you to know what I said to him.

With the general trend of the article I found myself in sympathy, and wanted to add only some marginal notes. Some of my comments were anticipated by the critical queries of Professor Urban.

In the second paragraph of the article he refers to the crucifix as standing "for an experience of the unconditioned transcendent"; and the way in which he moves from "the crucifixion on Golgotha" to "the redemptive action of God" and then on to this abstract philosophic interpretation, raises for me the whole problem of esoteric allegorical interpretation of symbols. It seems to me that this method of interpretation, long ago found in the Alexandrian school of early Christian theologians and more recently repeated by the Barthian, tends towards a highly individualistic treatment of symbols. This in turn tends towards arbitrariness, and incurs the risk of anathematizing that has already become apparent in Barthian circles. Not that Professor Tillich is so inclined, but that the method has its dangers.

The statement that words and signs originally "conveyed the meaning

<sup>8a</sup>FREEDOM OF THOUGHT IN THE OLD SOUTH. By Clement Eaton. Chapel Hill, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1940. 343 pp. \$3.00.

<sup>9</sup>Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1940. 634 pp. \$4.50.

<sup>10</sup>Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1940. 279 pp. \$2.00.

which they expressed, with an inherent power of their own" puzzles me. Is this power really resident in the symbols or in the associations which they have with the emotional experience of the interpreter? I cannot ascribe any metaphysical power "innate" in the symbol *per se*. Is it not rather that the context which gives it meaning gives it also an emotional significance which arouses powerful reactions in the person who experienced the sign in the context and thus attached the total meaning of the situational context to the symbol itself. What other "power" have symbols than this?

Dr. Urban's objection to the phrase applied to the unconditioned—"which transcends being-in-itself"—I share. The idea appears to come from Boehme's *Ungrund* and indicates a negation of all descriptions. But since the phrase "being-in-itself" is usually employed to connote the ultimate, the notion that there could be that which transcends the ultimate strikes me as a logical impossibility. At the same time, it is possible that Tillich has some other idea of "being" which ascribes to it a derived character. In this case there is a sort of meta-metaphysics. If he had even said "existence-as-such," I could have followed his logic.

On page 27 of the article he speaks of atheism as having "the religious function . . . to remind us that . . . the representations of the Unconditioned are not objects concerning whose existence or non-existence a discussion would be possible." Is this another form of the fictionalism which Vaihinger has expounded and which resembles pragmatism? Again, on the next page he speaks of the truth of a symbol as depending on "its inner necessity" in a way that implies a possible pragmatic test of truth as functional value. Does he really mean this?

If so it confirms a feeling that I have had that perhaps Dr. Tillich may be able to establish a contact for us between American pragmatism and European dialectical philosophy. In the first place, his emphasis on the role of decision in knowledge seems to me very much like Dewey's stress upon the role of problem-solving activity in the gaining of knowledge. In the second place, the naturalistic emphasis upon continuity of reality which characterizes his thought (despite his occasional transcendentalism) makes it congenial to a naturalistic mind. Perhaps he will some day write an article differentiating his conception of existential thinking from Dewey's conception of pragmatic intelligence. Such an article would merely increase my already great debt to his stimulating writings.

The Divinity School, The University of Chicago.

EDWIN E. AUBREY.

## SYMBOL AND KNOWLEDGE

A response by PAUL TILlich

To the Editor of THE JOURNAL OF LIBERAL RELIGION:

The criticism brought against my article on the "Religious Symbol" by Dr. Urban<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Aubrey gives me an excellent occasion to restate and

<sup>1</sup>Cf. THE JOURNAL OF LIBERAL RELIGION, II (1940), pp. 34-36.

develop some of the central ideas of that paper. I am, indeed, grateful to both of my critics as well as to the editor of this JOURNAL for the possibility of doing so. Three kinds of criticism are made by Urban and Aubrey, (1) criticisms that are entirely justified for reasons of formulation and translation, (2) criticisms in connection with which I need only enlarge on the points in question, and (3) criticisms in reply to which I must defend the idea itself against contrasting ideas.

## I.

Both Urban and Aubrey object to the phrase, "The unconditioned transcendent, the source of both existence and meaning which transcends being in itself as well as being for us." I do not think I would write this today, certainly not in English, which fortunately makes some ambiguities of the German philosophical terminology impossible. What I mean is that the ground of being is at the same time the abyss of any definite being; and conversely that the abyss of being which transcends all special beings is at the same time the creative ground of all forms of existence. They are all conditioned by it; but it itself is not conditioned by anything; they all are contained in it but it itself is not exhausted in their infinity. Therefore: "All knowledge of God has symbolic character." This is the second statement attacked by Urban in this context. I would defend this statement today; but I would admit that any symbolic knowledge presupposes some basis of non-symbolic knowledge and that pansymbolism defeats itself. (This, by the way, is the reason I have criticised Cassirer who seems to me the outstanding representative of pansymbolism.) The non-symbolic element in all religious knowledge is the experience of the unconditioned as the boundary, ground, and abyss of everything conditioned. This experience is the boundary-experience of human reason and therefore expressible in negative-rational terms. (But the unconditioned is not God.) God is the affirmative concept pointing beyond the boundary of the negative-rational terms and therefore itself a positive-symbolic term. The attempt of bad metaphysics to establish the idea of God in positive-rational terms is irrefutably rejected by Kant who follows here the predominant theological tradition. Positive-symbolic terms presuppose—in this I agree fully with Urban—that the immediate reality which is used in the symbol has something to do with the transcendent reality which is symbolized in it. Therefore I can accept the classical doctrine of "analogia entis," and I was challenged for this reason by Barth (with whom Urban identifies me to a degree which would surprise Barth as much as it has surprised myself). But while accepting the method of "analogia entis," I cannot accept any attempt to use it in the way of rational construction. The symbolic, affirmative concepts about God, his qualities and his actions, express the concrete form in which the mysterious ground and abyss of being has become manifest to a being as his ultimate concern in an act which we call "revelation." The special symbols are dependent on the concrete situation and configuration in which the mystery of the ground appears to us. The knowledge about God arising from such a concrete manifestation of the unconditioned is true, although

negative-  
rational-  
construction



it may be a relative, preliminary or distorted truth. But it is not a theoretical, it is an existential truth, that is a truth to which I cannot have the spectator-attitude, to which I must surrender in order to experience it. In this sense the "symbols provide no objective knowledge but yet a true awareness," namely, of the mystery of the ground, which never can become an object for a subject, but which draws the subject into the object thus overcoming the cleavage between them.

## II.

Aubrey asks whether this existential attitude to religious knowledge has something to do with pragmatism and even naturalism. (The question whether it is related to fictionalism is, I hope, in the preceding paragraphs answered unambiguously in the negative.) When I first came to this country I tried to connect "the philosophy of existence" and pragmatism, but with insufficient means. Since that time the problem has always interested me, especially because the idea of a "dynamic truth" as implied in the doctrine of the "Kairos" served as a mediating concept between the two philosophies. But the difference between the two philosophies is as important as the relationship: The decision which belongs to the dynamic-symbolic interpretation of religious knowledge is not a decision based on activities which follow the pattern of means and ends, i.e. the technical, instrumentalistic pattern which allows for the "distance" of aloofness of a testing experiment. But it is the decision which involves surrender, venturing faith, and for which there is no criterion and experimental test outside the situation itself. Within the situation, however, there is a criterion for every religious symbol—I have called it "The Guardian," namely, the unconditioned character of the unconditioned over against any symbol in which a conditioned, finite, exhaustible reality is made the expression of our ultimate concern. The acknowledgement of this criterion as it was applied in the prophetic and reforming criticism of distorted religious symbols makes all the difference of my position from naturalism.

This brings me to another set of questions, asked by Aubrey. He is puzzled by the statement that words and signs may have an inherent power of their own and he asks if it is not rather the context which gives meaning and emotional significance to symbols. To this I like to answer that signs certainly have not an inherent power; they are useful or not useful and can be changed arbitrarily. Just this, however, distinguishes them from symbols. Symbols are nearer to the reality expressed in them. Their direct, immediate, non-symbolic nature must have an original affinity to the symbolic content they represent. If water is used in religious rites, not the power of water as such has the religious effect; but the ritual context in which it stands. But it stands in this context, because it has natural qualities through which it is adequate to its ritual use (purification, regeneration, death and birth, etc.). If the word God, conveying the idea of the highest being is used for the expression of our unconditioned concern, the notions implied in the idea of a highest being make it adequate to stand for the ground and abyss of all being. If the cross of Christ is used as the central

symbol by many types of Christianity, the picture of Christ the crucified as described in the Gospels, makes it adequate to stand for the new relation between God and man, of which Christianity is the witness. This is not an arbitrary—and therefore fanatically defended—allegory, once the equation “Jesus is the Christ” is accepted. For in this moment the problem of “the Christ,” the transcendent “Son of Man” and “Son of God,” dying the ignominious death of a criminal, becomes a religious problem of the first order, and the attempts of the Gospels and of Paul to interpret it become necessary. Only in this context, in the full context of the Old and New Testament, and even of the general history of religion can it become the central symbol. To sever it from these connections and to make it directly “an experience of the unconditioned” is meaningless. But kept within this context the “Cross of the Christ” is a symbol in which without allegory or arbitrariness the new relation between God and man or the new understanding of our unconditioned concern is adequately expressed. The rational interpretations of this symbol vary—even in the same apostle or theologian; but the symbolic power of the picture itself is not dependent on a special interpretation as long as the interpretation is not a negation of the symbol as such.

### III.

Urban writes: “If our human ideas of God are of such character that all questions of the existence or non-existence of their referends are meaningless, then I cannot see how questions of the truth or falsity of our symbols can have anything more than humanistic significance.” I am not quite sure how much of this criticism belongs to the first and second part of this response and is answered implicitly by the preceding remarks and how far it represents a real opposition to my point of view. I am absolutely convinced that the discussion about the existence or non-existence of God is from the very beginning a negation of the idea of God. Viewing God as a being beside other things, even as the highest and most perfect being over all other beings, deprives God of his divinity, namely, of his unconditioned character. Existence means belonging to the context of being. A God who belongs to the context of being has above or below himself the ground and abyss of being, a God above God, a fate above the highest being. The question concerning the existence of God in this sense is one of the reasons for modern atheism. For, a God who is a probable hypothesis cannot be my ultimate concern. In this sense, and only in this sense, theology must completely dismiss the question of the existence or non-existence of God.

This problem must strictly be distinguished from the problem of the truth or falsity of religious assertions and symbols. In no realm of life is the question of truth as important as it is in religion. For, in the realm of the religious symbols the lack of truth is not error, but distortion, or to speak more exactly, it is demonic distortion or idolatry. The question of truth in religion is the question concerning the God who is really God and not the elevation of a finite being or value to divine

validity. But this is not the question of the existence or non-existence of a being. It is the question concerning the true or false interpretation of the meaning of being itself or of our ultimate concern. Nationalistic idolatry is not false because national Gods do not exist in the sense in which trees and stars and thoughts exist. But it is false because the nation, if it becomes the ultimate concern, is an idol and a demonic symbol.

I may conclude with the statement that the theory of the religious symbol presupposes that an ultimate concern, the ground of meaning and being, has the ultimate truth, is the condition of every relative and preliminary truth in such a way that even the most radical scepticism as long as it asserts something, is dependent on this ultimate truth. The theory of the religious symbol brings religious certainty back to its real and absolute foundation, liberating it from the infinite uncertainty of probable judgments about existence or non-existence.

Union Theological Seminary

New York City

PAUL TILlich.

---

### LANGUAGE, PHILOSOPHY AND LIBERAL RELIGION

To the Editor:

Mr. Ohrenstein's editorial: "Language and Liberal Religion" in the Summer number of *THE JOURNAL OF LIBERAL RELIGION*, is significant because it recognizes the present need for complete religious experience and its effective expression. However, some who seek the same end as Mr. Ohrenstein, cannot follow him in his wish to return to the language of the old myths, since for them that language is no longer potent to stir imagination and emotion. Rather, burdened with the weight of interpretation, even so much of it as still dominates many of our Unitarian services has become a weariness to body and mind, an obstacle to inspiration.

It is true that either within the church or without we must become fully alive and expressive, as in poetry and graphic art, but with understanding and wholly in accord with a solid basis of reason. Though Mr. Ohrenstein's experience with an expurgated form of service makes one wonder just how we can, in a modern way, accomplish this, one thing is sure: we cannot remain negative. Expurgation is but preliminary. Only positive, constructive thinking and positive expression will make our religious life possible.

It would be useful to have some articles on the subject by ministers who feel that the forms of service that they use are vital beginnings in this direction. If the synthesis can be accomplished in a church, we should, through these experiences, learn how to go about it. If, on the other hand, the church is too artificial to be significant, then the sooner we find it out the better, that we may seek the real thing only where it is to be found.

It seems as if there is enough material in the continuing growth and immediate application of our philosophy, in hymns free from unreasonable references, in art and architecture and music that need not symbolize the unacceptable—enough material to give people, meeting together, both in-



spiration and direction for living. If so, we need only persistence and patience to make it effective.

By any other course we sacrifice integrity and therefore life. Such, at our stage of evolution, is the power of thought. Faith in what has already been accomplished by the founders of liberalism, who sacrificed greatly for their freedom, and by those who have taken the inevitable steps that followed; faith in the direction we have travelled to a stage nearer maturity than that of the myth-makers,—such faith must be ours unless we are consciously heading for a new dark age. We have fanned the light of reason too bright for us now to make blindness an excuse.

The difference, after all, in points of view about the use of language, depends on a difference in underlying philosophy. Interpretation of the old will be easy to those who retreat to, or statically await the tide of current intellectual disintegration; necessity for the new will be pressing upon those who continue intellectual growth. If we would trust in words, they must have meaning for us; if thought that rings true enough to cause feeling, forces us to speak, words will have wings.

The problems of language will find a solution that depends on the deep fact of unity,—unity of the individual self and unity of truth. Discrimination enables us to understand what is meant by truth of objective knowledge and truth of appreciation, but if we are seeking whole understanding, we cannot see in this distinction any conflict in the truth of the inner self or in the truth of the universe.

Have aesthetic appreciation and the knowledge of the working and control of objective reality nothing to do with each other? Ask any sculptor, any architect. Is art ever more decadent than when beauty is detached from meaning? We may recover from erratic trends of modernism exhibited in experiments of painting and poetry, but it would take more than all the old gods together to rescue us, if war broke out between the thinking and the singing of our lives.

As old thought found old expression, so will new discovery produce new creation: perfect expression of unity of truth and integrity of living. Granted the need, the way is already determined, for nature gives but one choice: growth or death.

North Wilbraham, Mass.

RUTH T. ABBOTT.

---

To the Editor of the JOURNAL OF LIBERAL RELIGION:

Mr. Edward W. Ohrenstein's article on "Language and Liberal Religion" in the Summer 1940 issue of this Journal is thought-provoking for two main reasons. In the first place there is the very definite suggestion throughout that religious liberals, especially those with a naturalistic philosophy, have been too eager to abandon the great historic words of the Christian faith for a more scientific, sophisticated expression.

In the second place, Mr. Ohrenstein, though a member of the executive committee of the Humanist Press Association, shows a very definite trend in thinking away from naturalistic humanism to what H. N. Wieman has

called the "new supernaturalism." The present attention to the use or disuse of Christian words is interesting in itself, but to have it brought up by a man of Mr. Ohrenstein's views makes it doubly challenging.

To be sure, there is a good deal of truth in Mr. Ohrenstein's thesis, namely, that those religious liberals whose philosophy is of a monistic type have avoided the emotive words for a more scientific terminology. One of the mistakes of the humanist movement was that it regarded the whole problem of extending human values as merely one of intellectual formulation.

When we come to Mr. Ohrenstein's fifth thesis, however, it is much more difficult to find agreement, and his assertions seem a little too sweeping. For instance he states,

"Is there not ample evidence that precisely these two alternatives are being presented to us today? Either Barthian theology or Nazi politics; the faith of the New Theology, or the brutal materialism of fascism?" (p. 6)

No, there is not ample evidence that there are only these two alternatives for us. As a matter of fact there would be more justification for putting the matter this way: the faith of a naturalistic religion nourished by democratic advance over against Nazi politics *and* Barthian theology! It may seem a bit daring to put the New Theology in the same boat with the brutal materialism of fascism, but the two are related, for did not H. N. Wieman write in *Christendom*:

"It is no accident that the chief home and source of neo-supernaturalism today is also the land where rules the worst form of political dogmatism and violence. We do not mean that the Barthians are responsible for the evils that appear in Germany. We only mean that they are the products in religion of the same influences which have brought about the repudiation of the methods of reason and persuasion in politics. They represent in religion that same unreasoned dogmatism which, when it turns to political action, becomes violence and cruelty. In time it will become cruelty and violence in religion if neo-supernaturalism succeeds in upholding the claim that the ultimate reference of religion is rationally irresponsible."<sup>1</sup>

It seems clear that this controversy over language is much more than a matter of the use of the words—the failure of a scientific terminology to satisfy religious sentiment and the return to the formulations of historic Christianity in view of this apparent failure. For behind these historic formulations lies a philosophy and a theology which were undoubtedly meaningful in the past but which are largely meaningless in the present. It is fundamentally a matter of philosophy, of the world-system of mind and matter which best fits the available evidence. It may well be that religious liberals have not as yet indicated as fully as they should man's place in that system through "the language of value," and Mr. Ohrenstein has called attention to a very pressing problem. But when Mr. Ohrenstein seems to cast longing eyes to a type of theology which Dean Sperry describes as

<sup>1</sup>"The New Supernaturalism," *Christendom*, Winter 1938, pp. 72-73.

"the counsels of despair from Europe,"<sup>2</sup> may not one venture the opinion that he has over-stated his case?

Turner Valley, Alberta, Canada

A. STIERNOTTE.

### A COMMENT ON THE COMMENTS

To the Editor:

Both of the foregoing comments sharpen the point of difference, which reduces itself to this: does the language of the Christian tradition better describe in socially understood discourse the totality of human experience, than does the language of philosophic precision?

I am ready to add my testimony in behalf of the former, to that of Hugh Tigner, Reinhold Niebuhr, Professor Goodenough, and the rest of the authors cited in the footnotes of my article. (I neglected to mention a very pertinent book by John Crowe Ransom: *God Without Thunder*, Harcourt Brace, 1930.)

I am thus far persuaded that those critics of our times who condemn the secular sources of universal spiritual disintegration, are much closer to the issue than those who contend that mankind will reach some sort of eternal consummation by a semantic revolution. I have had experience as one of the latter.

Moreover, I am not convinced that recognition of the symbolic nature of religious discourse is "retreat," or that it indicates "defeat." It might be well for both Miss Abbott and Mr. Stiernotte to suspend judgment on the matter of "progress" or "retrogression." A truth of experience is the issue. The Unitarian Church, Hinsdale, Ill.

EDWARD W. OHRENSTEIN.

### A PROTEST

A communication has been received from Mr. John Gardner Greene of the Charles Street Meeting House, Boston, taking exception to Dr. D. Elton Trueblood's review of F. H. Foster's *Modern Movement in American Theology*, which appeared in the Summer 1940 issue of this journal. We regret that due to lack of space we find it impossible to publish this communication, and can only summarize the pertinent points as follows: (1) Dr. Foster's new book, to use his own words, "takes up the story of the New England theology where a previous volume [*Genetic History of the New England Theology*] left it." Hence, the criticism that he did not deal with Protestantism in general is therefore not valid. (2) Attention called by Dr. Trueblood to the omission of any references to William James and Rufus M. Jones is not pertinent as these men were outside the scope of Dr. Foster's inquiry: the later phases of the New England theology. (3) On the other hand, the book is not merely a history of Congregational thought, as Dr. Trueblood implies, for some of the wider aspects of Protestantism are included, *e.g.* the work of such leaders as William N. Clarke and George Burman Foster, who were not Congregationalists.

<sup>2</sup>Willard L. Sperry, *We Prophesy in Part*, Harpers & Bros., 1938.



## Book Reviews

### AN EXAMINATION OF PACIFISM

This book<sup>1</sup> is by the present director of the Left Book of the Month Club in England, who was formerly minister of the Unitarian church in Ipswich, England. It is the most comprehensive and the most lucid published statement of the case against pacifism, for secular and Christian persons both. It discusses for the most part with a minimum of heat and a maximum of light the contention that the pacifist resembles the unhappy hero of the limerick:

*There once was a man who said how  
Shall I soften the heart of this cow?  
I will sit on this stile,  
And continue to smile  
Till I soften the heart of this cow.*

A distinction is drawn between two quite different pacifist positions. The first is based upon the "broad general principle that no end however good justifies the adoption of evil means." This is denominated *absolutist*. It is characteristic of the religious pacifist.

The contention is refuted by demonstrating that absolutism in any department of ethics is necessarily in error. Moral judgments depend on the man. (As the Greeks had it, "Man is the measure of all things.") The man judges consciously or unconsciously in terms of his estimation of consequences. All men are willing to commit or undergo evils (like undesired studying or visits to the dentist) to obtain greater goods. It is an error to judge evils necessarily wrong until the circumstances have been analyzed. The reviewer commends this chapter especially to churchfolk. Parallel treatments may arrive at the same conclusion more simply and with wider application—but for those numerous religionists (as numerous in our fellowship as in others) who deny or misunderstand the *methods* of modern science, no better discussion can be imagined. If these methods, as generalized in the science of semantics, were more widely used, the errors of absolutism might be more readily exposed.

The second pacifist position is the *utilitarian* one, that war never achieves good results. Here the same approach that violence is to be judged not "in complete isolation" but with relation to "motive and purpose," must be used. Evil may breed evil; but it may be that if evil were not resisted with evil, still greater evils would occur. Non-resistance in such a case would be wrong, rather than resistance. Utilitarian pacifism breaks down in numerous cases cited; firm suppression of racketeering does not breed more racketeering necessarily; the Dutch War of Independence led to the development of a high class civilization, much superior to that which grew up in the territories remaining under Spanish rule. Here again, the author

---

<sup>1</sup>THE CASE AGAINST PACIFISM. By John Lewis, B.Sc., Ph.D. London: Allen & Unwin (Canadian distributors, Ryerson Press), 1940. 238 pp. \$2.75.

marshals evidence and argument with rare understanding and great skill. However, the introduction of some of the facts of strategy and modern war would have shown the errors of modern pacifism more conclusively.

Without any of the unpleasantness which a brief summary here may suggest, the author characterizes the pacifist position as a belief that the "sinner must suffer for the policy of the saints," as a form of "spiritual snobbishness" based upon the discovery that "life is harsh and difficult" (this makes it easier for the pacifist to declare that he "won't play") and, lastly, as an evasion of the conclusions that ought to be drawn from Jesus' willingness to compromise with the world unready for his message.

This book is far and away the best statement on the subject now in print. The author unfortunately has an enthusiasm for the U.S.S.R. which many of us cannot share and he feels it necessary to derive illustrations from recent Russian history, and to point out that the Russian policy in the present conflict is the correct one for the peace-lover. It may be so. But even if it were so, the points about Russia are not necessary to the argument; and the ill-educated will think that by demolishing them, they have destroyed the soundness of the major portion of the work.

Belmont, Massachusetts

LEWIS DEXTER.

### THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SCHOOL

This is a very useful study.<sup>1</sup> The author, a Unitarian minister in Transylvania, offers a summary of the views of several score of scholars who have made contributions to our present understanding of Jesus' teaching concerning the Kingdom of God, from Strauss to Dodd, Lohmeyer, Bultmann, Dibelius, Wendland, and other contemporaries. J. Weiss and Schweitzer are naturally at the center of the book, earlier scholars leading up to them and later scholars taking their start from them. The summaries are interesting and illuminating. The final chapter in the book is a summary of the summaries. The writers who have been considered are grouped together according as they think of Jesus' conception of the Kingdom as having been "exclusively spiritual," "exclusively eschatological," and "intermediate." Those belonging to the "intermediate" group are again divided according as the "spiritual" or the "eschatological" predominates. The writer's own views, which have appeared from time to time in the course of the volume, emerge more clearly in the final paragraphs. He does not believe Jesus' ethic is an interim ethic. It is rather, in its most characteristic form, not eschatological at all. And it is this ethic, rather than his eschatology, that the Christian church should emphasize.

The Divinity School,

The University of Chicago.

JOHN KNOX.

<sup>1</sup>L'ÉCOLE ESCHATOLOGIQUE ET SES ADVERSAIRES: étude critique de l'interprétation de la notion du royaume de Dieu chez Jésus depuis Strauss jusqu'à nos jours. By Louis Kovacs. Strasbourg, 1938. 25 frs.

## JESUS AND HIS INTERPRETERS

Anyone to whom *The Syrian Christ* has been for years a satisfying commentary, within easy reach on one's study shelves, bespattered by copious marginal annotations, will take up Doctor Rihbany's new book on Jesus with eager expectancy.<sup>1</sup> He may lay it down with mingled feelings of appreciation and disappointment. In its presentation of the personality and teachings of Jesus as the Gospels, especially the Synoptics, reveal him, and that carry to the open mind their own corrective of the prepossessions of his reporters—"Jesus over the heads of his reporters," in Matthew Arnold's apt phrase; in the author's profound reverence for the Master and his insistence on the indispensable leadership of Jesus as "Brother and Guide," "due to the fact that he was a man in whom the spiritual genius of humanity—whose source is God—rose to supreme height;" in his clear demonstration that the truth-demanding modern mind helps rather than hinders such appreciation—in all this the book is a welcome contribution to an understanding of Jesus. The author's treatment of the other interpretations, however, leaves much to be desired. It seems to assume that they were entirely perverse misinterpretations, contributing nothing but obscurity to our understanding of the many-sided character who, as the late Professor Orella Cane termed him, is "the enigma of the centuries and the solution of their problems." Doctor Rihbany says many true things as to the process by which the interpretations of Jesus as Messiah, the incarnate "Word," the very Deity, took shape. But he gives almost no idea as to what theme was inherent in the simple Nazarene prophet that evoked them. May not an interpretation be significant even though partial and inadequate?

Why was it that "the inner circle of disciples . . . hoped that he was the expected Messiah," if no Messianic consciousness of any sort forced its way to their minds through the unexpectant guise?—as at Caesarea Philippi? Why did the Greek devotees of the Logos philosophy select Jesus, a Hebrew rabbi, as the being in whom "the Word was made flesh"? Did Athanasius merely invent or did he recognize Jesus as the incarnation of "the humanity of God and the divinity of man"?—a doctrine of which the later so-called Athanasian creed is a stupid caricature. These interpretations were serious attempts to say important truths about Jesus. They became perversions of his spirit when assent to them as official dogmas was substituted for fidelity to his teachings and his life. But the impulse to formulate them was not itself a perversion. One may accept or reject them, but one's own interpretation may be the richer from trying to understand what they tried to say. Such an understanding is suggested here and there in passages of the book. Helpful as it is, it would be more helpful if such appreciation were less incidental. The book would then not be disfigured by so unjust a dictum as "the church never knew the real Nazarene, either as a man or a teacher"! First Universalist National Memorial Church,

Washington, D. C.

FREDERICK W. PERKINS.

<sup>1</sup>FIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF JESUS. By Abraham Mitrie Rihbany. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1940. 116 pp. \$1.75.



## THE SYNTHESIS OF MODERN KNOWLEDGE

Out of the welter of contemporary ideas is rising a synthesis not inferior to the golden sequence of Periclean Athens nor to the "thirteenth: greatest of centuries." Such is the opinion of Prof. Oliver Reiser in his most recent book.<sup>1</sup> His sub-title: "Toward a Unification of Scientific, Religious, Social and Economic Thought," announces his purpose. This unification has, in my opinion, actually been taking shape in the hands of men such as Whitehead, Dewey, S. Alexander, Broad, Hartshorne, Sellars and others. Reiser's volume is a significant contribution to the movement.

The central concept is that of organicity. In the primitive pre-logical era men saw their world under the aspect of "mystical unity." Emotional predominance led to the belief in mystical "participation" of one entity in another. There was poor differentiation between separate objects. The era might be characterized by the axiom: "Everything is everything else." The second period in the history of our thinking was that of the Aristotelian orientation which still dominates our thought habits. Aristotelian logic conceives entities as separate and distinct, emphasizes the subject-predicate proposition and two-valued logic, and reaches an inevitable *cul-de-sac* in rationalism and individualism. It chops up the smooth flow of reality into those artificial categories detested by Bergson. Its axiom: "This is this, that is that, this is not that."

Contemporary philosophy sees the faint dawn of a new non-Aristotelian epoch, fusing reason and emotion, fitting the individual into the group, recovering the sense of nature's unity, and grounding thought in a multi-valued relational logic. The resulting achievement is a "metaphysical unity." When Whitehead says that the individual is in the world and the world is in the individual, he is not guilty of pre-logical atavism. "Metaphysical unity" must be won by dire labor out of the confusion of multiplicity.

The new synthesis is not set up as ultimate. Aristotle's baneful influence is felt in the notion of a completed universe, full-panoplied with beings, and tending to that circularity which alone can be the outward form of perfection. "The weakness of classical physics was its necessity for absolutes." Thought can abandon its quest for certainty: we now understand that except for analytic propositions of the form *ab is a*, all propositions are merely probable. Beyond history is simply more history, beyond nature is simply more nature.

Such is the case because we live in a universe exhibiting unceasing emergence of new organisms. There are no isolated bits of matter possessing simple location. Every true individual is an organic individual. Material objects are like men: not truly themselves apart from the society furnished by their space-time context. Of man it may be said that he "is social first of all, and is an individual only derivatively." Society in its entirety is an

<sup>1</sup>THE PROMISE OF SCIENTIFIC HUMANISM. By Oliver Leslie Reiser. New York. Oskar Piest, 1940. 364 pp. \$4.00.

organism of which we are the cells; beyond human society is the universal organism which Reiser calls the "world sensorium."

The concept of organism leads to its fellow-concept—emergence. The ascent of emerging entities follows the now-familiar pattern from electrons to atoms to molecules to physical objects to biological organisms to mind to—? The progress will never cease. Even now, through such experiments as Dr. Rhine's on extra-sensory perception, we catch the glimmerings of the next level of emergence. Man is a bridge between the animal and the superman, an arrow of longing for the other shore.

Prof. Reiser's metaphysical view might be called a "dynamic naturalism." Affirming that earth is enough, he rejects the super-natural on the one hand; by conceiving a universe vibrant with creative energy he escapes materialistic mechanism, on the other hand. Such a universe, he hopes, achieves the nineteenth century ideal: it "runs itself." Herein consists the essence of Prof. Reiser's humanism. There are times, however, when he resorts to the flamboyant vocabulary of the Renaissance visionaries. By dallying with such terms as psychic ether, world sensorium, super-organism, alchemy, elixir of life, light bearers, philosopher's stone, and so forth, he makes us feel like the old miner whose best friend dealt himself five aces.

The following concepts unite in the modern synthesis: organicism, dynamic naturalism, statistical law, relativity, emergence, relational logic, and probability theory. Prof. Reiser unites them all in an admirable contribution to contemporary thought.

The University Church of  
Seattle, Washington

ALEXANDER WINSTON.

---

### A CRITIQUE OF HUMANISM

Save your time and do not read this book.<sup>1</sup> Every source is secondary and even tertiary. The author has read only John Dewey's *Quest for Certainty*, John Dietrich's sermon, "My Idea Of God," and quotations made by other readers from *Humanist Sermons*, edited by Curtis Reese. He discusses so-called early humanism as it appeared in Buddhism, Confucianism, and early Greek philosophy, but shows every evidence of having never read the sources or studied the systems directly.

His argument follows Paley's *Evidences* without even Paley's debatable cogency, and he relies for scientific proof upon Sir James Jeans, even marshalling Dr. Einstein to pay testimony to a personal God!

Unity Church, St. Paul, Minnesota

WALLACE W. ROBBINS.

---

<sup>1</sup>*Modern Humanism and Christian Theism*. By Elias Andrews. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1938. 232 pp. \$1.50.



## Contents of Volume II

### ARTICLES

ADAMS, JAMES LUTHER.	
Some Recent Books on Democracy and Religion.....	93
Freud, Mannheim, and the Liberal Doctrine of Man.....	107
ALLIN, J. BRYAN. Chronicle.....	52
BAHM, ARCHIE J. Humanism <i>versus</i> Humanists.....	197
BETH, KARL. The Contributions of Freud's and Jung's Depth Psychology to the Understanding of the Christian Message.....	112
GRAY-SMITH, ROWLAND. Religious Fact and Scientific Value....	69
LÉO, ALBERT. A Message from France.....	48
LYTTLE, CHARLES. Recent Unitariana.....	198
MARCK, SIEGFRIED. Neo-Humanism in Europe and America.....	37
MERTON, ROBERT K. Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Knowledge .....	125
MONDALE, R. LESTER. High Religion and Economic Folk Religion .....	59
OHRENSTEIN, EDWARD W. Language and Liberal Religion.....	3
REESE, CURTIS W. Toward Organic Humanism.....	75
ROBINS, SIDNEY S. Professor Otto on Science and God.....	84
SHILS, EDWARD. Irrationality and Planning: A Note on Mann- heim's <i>Man and Society in an Age of Transformation</i> .....	148
TIGNER, HUGH STEVENSON. The Church Is Necessary.....	176
TILLICH, PAUL. The Religious Symbol.....	13
URBAN, WILBUR M. A Critique of Professor Tillich's Theory of the Religious Symbol.....	34
WALEN, GEORG J. M. Kierkegaard's Existential System.....	187
WIEMAN, HENRY NELSON. Theology and the Philosophy of Religion: A Comparison and a Contrast.....	163

### BOOK REVIEWS

ADAMS, HENRY. <i>Democracy</i> . By James Luther Adams.....	93
ANDREWS, ELIAS. <i>Modern Humanism and Christian Theism</i> . By Wallace W. Robbins.....	214
BAKER, ARCHIBALD G. <i>Short History of Christianity</i> . By Charles Lyttle .....	206
BATES, ERNEST SUTHERLAND. <i>American Faith</i> . By Stephen H. Fritchman .....	103
BERNAL, J. D. <i>The Social Function of Science</i> . By James Luther Adams .....	94
BROOKS, VAN WYCK. <i>New England: Indian Summer</i> . By Charles Lyttle .....	200
COLE, WALTON E. <i>The American Way of Life</i> . By Sydney B. Snow.....	160
<i>The Choice Before Us</i> . By Sydney B. Snow.....	160
DEMANT, V. A. <i>The Religious Prospect</i> . By James Luther Adams..	99
EATON, CLEMENT. <i>Freedom of Thought in the Old South</i> . By Charles Lyttle .....	201



FRANK, WALDO. <i>Chart for Rough Waters</i> . By James Luther Adams.	98
FOOTE, HENRY WILDER. <i>Three Centuries of American Hymnody</i> . By Charles Lyttle.....	199
FOSTER, FRANK HUGH. <i>The Modern Movement in American Theology</i> . By D. Elton Trueblood.....	56
GABRIEL, RALPH HENRY. <i>The Course of American Democratic Thought</i> . By James Luther Adams.....	95
KOVACS, LOUIS. <i>L'École Eschatologique et ses Adversaires</i> . By John Knox.....	211
LEWIS, JOHN. <i>The Case against Pacifism</i> . By Lewis Dexter.....	210
McCOLGAN, JOSEPH T. <i>Joseph Tuckerman, Pioneer in American Social Work</i> . By Charles Lyttle.....	198
MELLONE, SYDNEY HERBERT. <i>The Bearings of Psychology on Religion</i> . By Karl Beth.....	55
MORSE, JAMES K. <i>Jedidiah Morse, a Champion of New England Orthodoxy</i> . By Charles Lyttle.....	199
NEVE, J. L. <i>Churches and Sects of Christendom</i> . By Charles Lyttle....	201
PARSONS, TALCOTT. <i>The Structure of Social Action</i> . By James Luther Adams .....	95
PRATT, JAMES BISSETT. <i>Naturalism</i> . By Harold Buschman.....	101
RADCLIFFE-BROWN, A. R. <i>Taboo</i> . By James Luther Adams.....	95
REISER, OLIVER L. <i>The Promise of Scientific Humanism</i> . By Alexander Winston .....	213
RIHBANY, ABRAHAM M. <i>Five Interpretations of Jesus</i> . By Frederick W. Perkins.....	212
RUSK, RALPH L. <i>Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson</i> . By Charles Lyttle .....	200
SHEPARD, ODELL. <i>Journals of Bronson Alcott</i> . By Charles Lyttle..	200
SONNE, NIELS HENRY. <i>Liberal Kentucky</i> . By Charles Lyttle.....	198
TIGNER, HUGH STEVENSON. <i>Our Prodigal Son Culture</i> . By Robert Cummins.....	154
By Frederick M. Eliot.....	156
Mr. Tigner's Rejoinder.....	159
VLASTOS, GREGORY. <i>Christian Faith and Democracy</i> . By James Luther Adams .....	100

## COMMUNICATIONS

ABBOTT, RUTH T. <i>Language, Philosophy and Liberal Religion</i> ....	206
AUBREY, EDWIN E. "The Religious Symbol".....	201
GREENE, JOHN GARDNER. <i>A Protest</i> .....	209
OHRENSTEIN, EDWARD W. <i>A Comment on the Comments</i> .....	209
OTTO, M. C. <i>A Reply to Prof. Robinson</i> .....	54
ROBINSON, ELMO A. <i>Science and God</i> .....	53
STIERNOTTE, ALFRED. <i>Language, Philosophy and Liberal Religion</i> .....	207
TILLICH, PAUL. <i>Symbol and Knowledge</i> .....	202